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SILCOTE OF SILCOTES.



. SILCOTE OF SILCOTES.

BY

HENRY KINGSLEY,

AUTHOR OF "RAVENSHOE," "THE HILLIARS AND THE BURTONS," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.



London:

MACMILLAN AND CO.

1868.

250. x. 77.

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LONDON :
R. CLAY, SON, AND TAYLOR, PRINTERS,
BREAD STREET HILL.

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SILCOTE OF SILCOTES.

CHAPTER I.

ARTHUR GOES TO TEA WITH MISS RAYLOCK.

THERE lived in the village near Silcotes two people called Mr. and Mrs. Jones, in no way remarkable, except that they knew every one about that part of the country; and every one considered them to be so amiable, so inoffensive, and so insignificant, that they found themselves, some three times a week, the repositories of the most important secrets; sometimes, I regret to say, of actionable libels.

And they didn't know why, and no one could tell them. The great fact remains, however,—an undisturbed, good, and undeniable fact. Everybody told them everything.

Sometimes, at first, one used to think that the reason of their being such general confidants was that they were a safe couple, and held their tongues. One might go as far as to say that separately, and at certain times, they *did* hold their tongues, and you got to trust them. But afterwards, when they were both together even, you found that you could get anything out of them you liked. Taken apart, one soon found they were a pair of sieves, and wondered much why they should be elected as the confidants of the neighbourhood. You came to the conclusion that they were not so chosen for their reticence, but for the opposite quality. You have many things which you would wish to reach your neighbours' ears, and yet which you would not like to say first-hand. One began to see, after a time, that the Joneses were not so much confidants, as vehicles.

A certain now eminent man was once roundly abused in a common-room, in which he was not present, by a certain theologian. The mutual friend, the vehicle, brought the intelligence to him, then a struggling man. He had one weapon, and he used it; he had the mutual communicative friend. "He is a ruffian,

and drinks!" said he to the mutual friend, knowing that it would be carried faithfully. The knife went between the old theologian's ribs deeper than if the stab had been made first-hand. The retort was false, though not falser than the attack; but it hit deeper. Mr. and Mrs. Jones were often used in this way.

They were, at all events, on the very best terms with every one. They were on the most intimate terms with Miss Raylock, and that very good old lady was by no means averse to an innocent accumulation of facts about her neighbours: had not mankind, with its virtues, its foibles, its ways of action, been the study of her life? Was she to lose all interest in her neighbours because she had left off writing uncommonly smart and unmistakeable sketches of them? Not at all. Why, Squire Silcote himself stood as hero in her novel of "*Cleverness and Credulity*." And she naturally was most anxious to see whether or no her guess as to his future would come true. She was in the habit also of declaring humorously among friends that, if she were younger, she would write another novel, and call it "*Priggery and Pugnacity*," the hero of which should be young Arthur Silcote; for she could not

bear that young gentleman at all. She was, in short, a nice old lady, one-half of a good gossip herself. She could listen admirably, and in a tentative way; making you talk about your neighbours until she knew what she wanted; and then changing the conversation by a little prudish advice about the evil of talking about your neighbours' affairs. As for getting one word out of her, except what she chose to speak deliberately, that was perfectly hopeless. The other half of the qualities of a really good gossip, a sieve-like incontinence of speech, was wanting in her. She was, therefore, a very intimate acquaintance of the Joneses, who, however, never gratified their curiosity about the Princess, for example, much as they desired it. When they had laid their treasures of hearsay at Miss Raylock's feet, they had only to make the slightest inquiry as to the antecedents of that sainted Princess to make Miss Raylock bridle, and say that they had been talking quite enough about other folks' affairs, and begin talking of agriculture or geology.

She was a perfect old empress in her way. She considered that an invitation to tea with her was of quite as much importance, as great a compliment, as

one of those dreadful invitations to Compiègne. The Joneses, who were mildly literary, rich, and very agreeable, were in the habit of "having down" literary men, artists, theatrical people, sometimes also people concerned in the government of the country, noble or other. The Joneses had champagne, pictures, rare books, carriages and horses, flowers, and India-rubber opinions of the most advanced order, suited for all guests, and expressed in the most advanced language; in short, everything which can make life worth having. But the great treat which they proposed to all their guests—from the Rev. Mr. A. (U. S.), the Baptist missionary of Nevada, to Mr. Z. the ultra-Anglican ceremonialist; from Mr. Dawkins, the man who considered Mr. Bright a half-hearted man, too cautious and compromising, to Mr. Hawkins, the Tory Essex agriculturist—the treat proposed to all these people was the same. They schemed and fished for an invitation to tea with Miss Raylock. A. and Z., Dawkins and Hawkins,—it was all the same. They believed in Miss Raylock, and these people *must* come to tea with her. If they had never heard of her, that was their ignorance; if they had never read her books,

that was their neglect; if they had read them, and did not like them, that was their want of taste. But they must not be allowed to suppose that, because one lived in the provinces, one was getting in the rear of thought. Miss Raylock was the only visible intellectual phenomenon in those parts; and the high honour of going to tea with her was a sacred one.

So these two honest toadies of the good old woman made a queen of her, and kept her to the belief that such honest and good thought as she had uttered in her day, and with some purpose, was still current under *her* stamp. In the main she was right. The truth she had told was recognised truth still, but it had been handled by fifty hands since, some coarser, some finer than hers. The most ever said about her in the world was now and then by some critic of fiction, who had read her books; and the most that such a man ever said was: "Why old Miss Raylock said the very same thing five and twenty years ago." The old lady knew nothing of all this. She had once been a queen, and she considered herself a queen still. And her peremptory refusal to admit Dawkins, the Radical and Atheist (as she called him), into her house, is

still preserved among the archives of the Jones family. They have a profound respect and fear for the old lady, which does in a way both themselves and the old lady credit. A shrewd tongue is a great possession. I doubt whether Mrs. Jones had a prouder moment in her life than when she broke gently to the great Dawkins, the headlong democrat, the fact that Mrs. Raylock couldn't make her principles coincide with asking him to tea! Dawkins was not amused, because he was not in possession of facts, and had never in his life heard of Miss Raylock. But the triumph was great for Mrs. Jones. "You are a great and dangerous man, you Dawkins, but here is one greater than you."

There came one day to call on these Joneses, Arthur Silcote, in a rather more pragmatic frame of mind than usual. It was only a day or two after the peremptory rejection of Dawkins, and Mrs. Jones, naturally proud of such a very exclusive acquaintance, such a very celebrated personage, before so famous a scholar as Arthur, mentioned it accidentally to him.

"Miss Raylock?" he said. "And who is Miss Raylock?"

This was such an astounding and puzzling rejoinder that Mrs. Jones sat perfectly silent, not having made up her mind whether to be indignant or scornful. Arthur saved her the trouble.

"Oh, Miss Raylock," he added quickly; "I know. She is the funny old trot of a mad woman who lives in the village. Of course I know. How stupid I am."

Mrs. Jones said quietly, "She is not mad, Mr. Silcote. She has known you and yours for many years. I am astonished that you should not remember her. Your memory is getting short."

For one moment, when she said these words, Arthur's eyes twitched and wandered, and a look of deep anxiety came over his deadly pale beautiful face. He was himself again in a moment, and said:—

"Well, a man with his brain worked like mine cannot remember everything. There is no need to tell him that his memory is breaking and his mind going" ("his manners too," thought Mrs. Jones) "because he cannot at a moment remember the name of an old mad woman. I remember her perfectly well now, and I beg your pardon. So she would not have the great Dawkins to tea, eh? Plucky old lady. I will show her how I

appreciate her conduct by going and having tea with her myself this very afternoon."

"Has she asked you?" said Mrs. Jones.

"Not she. I am going to ask myself."

"I wouldn't do that if I were you," replied Mrs. Jones, and then more eagerly, "Pray don't do anything so—so—rash!"

"Rude begins with the same letter as rash," said Arthur; "was that the real word?"

"Oh dear, no, not at all," replied Mrs. Jones, with as much emphasis as is allowed to a lady in these times.

"But I wouldn't go if I were in your place."

"Why not?"

"Because, if I were in your place, I should not think of doing anything of the kind."

Seeing that Mrs. Jones had retired behind the bulwark of female reiteration—and a terrible strong one it is—Arthur laughed, and departed on his rather rude and self-sufficient errand. He remembered Miss Raylock well enough now, but somehow had got to think she was dead. There are some old people whom we always hesitate to inquire after on our return to our native village. Arthur had been living very fast,

I mean intellectually fast, and Miss Raylock had got confused in his mind with some one else. Things *did* get confused to him now sometimes ; he *felt* it, though he would not acknowledge it to himself ; and it vexed him, and made him angry. He was in one of his later and (may I say it of one who was really a noble person ?) more ill-conditioned moods when he rang at Miss Raylock's garden gate.

It was Miss Raylock's love of beauty which, in the first instance, made her write tales at all : it was her intense love of order which made her write them so well. Having retired wisely and nobly, with her prestige untouched, from her task of telling the beauty of order to the world with her pen, she had expressed it to herself and the few friends who came to see her in her house and her garden. People for whom even the Joneses dared not ask an invitation to tea were allowed to see her garden,—a maze of flowers, from the time when the Christmas roses raised their pale heads from the frosty ground, to the time when the last chrysanthemum drooped his bold head before the

“ Hungry wind that went wandering about
Like a wolf which has smelt a dead child out.”

Of the exquisite order of her quaint little cottage we need not speak here. It is only the beauty of her garden with which we have to do. This old maid, whose pride it was never to have had a lover, had an intense love for certain forms of beauty. And even in her devotions to her flowers you found, when you came to know her well, that the old feeling in favour of order was stronger than the almost equally strong feeling for ostentatious gaudy colouring. A coreopsis was dearer to her than a prize balsam,—the perfect folding of the old moss-rose, or the *Souvenir de Malmaison*, dearer to her than the rich barbarity of colour with the inferior and lower form of such a rose as *Ophirie*.

It was high summer-time on the afternoon of which we speak, and the whole of the garden flamed and blazed with rows and piles of well-ordered colour. What little green there was was as smooth as a billiard-table; the gravel, scarcely less smooth than the grass, was guiltless of a leaf or a straw: the whole place was faint with a thousand scents, hot and quiet—one vivid blaze of brilliant painting, under a bright summer sun; and in the midst of it all, alone in the sunlight, utterly colourless in face, stood Arthur Silcote, in black from

head to foot, a wonderful foil to all the bright colour around him.

There was beauty of a rare kind, and order of a rare kind, in him too,—of a rarer and higher kind than any which could be found in the very best flower in Miss Raylock's garden. But Miss Raylock, after having said to her little maid, "Let him in," could not see it, and said, looking through her drawing-room window, "Aha! my young gentleman! and so *you* are there. I shall begin to believe in the Princess's table-rapping soon!"

Arthur was let in by the door which led into the garden, and took his solitary black figure from among the brilliant flowers and the bright sun into the dark little drawing-room of Miss Raylock. The common or combination room of a college is not the very best place for studying the habits and ways of ladies, but Arthur's nose was by this time sufficiently educated to tell him that he was in the drawing-room of a lady. There was nothing to guide him to any conclusion but his nose; for, coming out of the brilliant sun, and more brilliant flowers, his eyes were perfectly useless; his ears also were of very little use to him, for Miss Raylock stood

up perfectly still and silent, eyeing him with intense curiosity, like a cunning little old bird.

"How much do you know, and what is the amount of your influence, my little gentleman?" she said to herself, but remained silent just long enough to give Arthur time to see that he had done a very impertinent thing. Seeing a dim grey figure before him, and feeling that he must go through with his adventure, he of course spoke first.

"I have come to pay you a visit, Miss Raylock."

"You got my invitation to tea, then?" said the old lady; "that is right."

Arthur felt deeply foolish, but he could not lie in the very least degree under any circumstance whatsoever. He had therefore to answer, "No."

"That is not wonderful," said the inexorable old lady, "seeing that it never was written. And, though I certainly do want to see you, yet I doubt if it would ever have been written. I don't like you, young gentleman, and so I warn you; shall I tell you why?"

"I don't think we should gain anything by that, Miss Raylock," said Arthur, laughing, and perfectly at his ease. She was using his own weapons, and he was

perfectly at home with them. "The reason of my visit here is very simple. I was given to understand that your tea-drinkings were very exclusive businesses, and I determined at once that I would drink tea with you uninvited. I should do the same thing (with different tactics) if I was defied to appear at one of the Duchess of Cheshire's balls."

"That is very neat," said Miss Raylock; "at least, very neat for a Silcote. The Duchess of Cheshire and myself, as leaders of exclusion, would, you imply, be both flattered by having their Olympus scaled by such a giant as yourself."

"That is not quite so neat as my pretty speech, my dear madam; and I think you will find in real life badinage rapidly deteriorates in point after the first few retorts, and the common-room is not a bad school for repartee. Suppose we drop it. The question is, have I earned my tea by my impudence?"

"You have."

"Then ring the bell, if you can see where it is; and let there be peace between us."

He had calculated on her being amused and pleased by his "bumptiousness," and he had reckoned right.

Besides, he knew the old lady was fond of celebrities (her "Recollections" prove that), and he was in his way an eminent man. She began to feel friendly towards him, and had no reason to be afraid of him. She confessed to herself that, if her object had been to match her brains against his, she would have felt afraid. Her object only was to speak of certain things and names, and see how they affected him. They were very soon quite comfortable together. She was a shrewd and pleasant talker, in addition to being a wonderfully well-posted woman. Arthur, who at one time that afternoon really had half forgotten about her, found that she was very pleasant, and that he was enjoying himself. Italy was the subject she chose to stick to, and, the shrewd Arthur believed, because he had never been there, and she wanted to show off. But she showed off very charmingly; so much so, that when she said, "Did you notice my flowers?" he was rather sorry that she had changed the conversation.

"I noticed them, and they are very beautiful. Stay, that is *façon de parler*. They were too gaudy; almost barbarically gaudy."

"You are right," she said. "But, when you are as

old as I am, and your eyes get dim, and your bones get cold, you will pine, as I do, for colours and warmth, even though it be barbaric. These horrible long English winters, without light, without colour, without warmth, make one sigh for the delicious winters of Italy."

And, although the old lady spoke of dimmed eyes and chilled bones, *her* eyes were as bright and as inquisitive as a jackdaw's, and her attitude of intense curiosity spoke of anything but a rheumatic old age. The room perhaps was too dark for Arthur to notice this, and he only said, "I wonder you don't go to Italy, Miss Raylock. You have spent the winter there then?"

"One or two," she said, sitting back in her chair. "One very pleasant one. Let me see. Whom did we have at Florence that year? Let me speak slowly, and remember. There were Pozzo Argentino, and your father, and your aunt the Princess, and Castelnovo: one ought to put the lady before the gentleman, though," and here she watched him intensely; "and their factotum Kriegsturm, who murdered the postillion,"—(speaking very slow here)—"at least he was proved not to have murdered him; but then, as we all believed he

did, it was very charming and romantic to have a man we knew to be an Austrian, and whom we thought to be a murderer, as major-domo ; but I am getting below-stairs. We novelists, you know, study all ranks in life from duty. And then we had Symplegadesi, the Greek—a charming person, but, I fear, a sad rogue. How he got his name together I leave to a fellow and tutor of Balliol. And then there were the Hathertons, from Boston—most charming specimens of the very best kind of Americans, and the Lennoxes, from New Orleans—equally charming ; and, last not least, my dear old friend, Count Frangipanni, the patriot. You know him, of course ?”

Arthur did not. She saw that he knew nothing of any of these people except his father and aunt. She went on. There was another name she kept in reserve, and she watched for the effect of it carefully.

“ We had a very pleasant winter, I assure you. I suppose it is wrong for English artists, authors, poets and so on, to leave these muddy skies for clearer ones ; but they do. Heine twits us with it. Our best poetess is there now, saying all kinds of things about the future of Italy to English ears, when she might be as well

employed in singing the wrongs of the agricultural labourers at home. However, I have done the same thing in my time. I had a charming old villa—not at all like Dickens's 'Pink Jail'—and used to receive these people. They are uncomfortable, though, those Italian country-houses, in winter. There is no preparation for cold. A place like Ufton is worth all of them together in winter. Do you know Ufton?"

"I know it well. I should think that Samuel Reade must have painted 'Sprites' Hall' or the 'Haunted House' from it."

"So I should think," said Miss Raylock. "You do know Ufton, do you? And how, for instance?"

"I am much interested in St. Mary's College in Hampshire, and that is the nearest great house to it. I know it well—a place of bats and owls; the most perfect specimen of what they call a Tudor country-house I have ever seen."

"How far is it from the college?"

"About six miles."

"Do you know that the upholsterers are in it, and that they are doing it up—that the owner is coming back?"

"No. I have heard nothing, and care to know nothing about it. I suppose I shall lose the run of the grounds now."

"You at all events know the name of the proprietor, who is coming back from Italy to live there?"

"I can't say I can remember it."

"Sir Godfrey Mallory."

She looked more keenly than ever at him now. He only answered, without any change of feature, "Hah! descendant of the man who wrote 'Morte D'Arthur,' I suppose. Is he an old goose? I'll make him believe about the 'Morte D'Arthur,' and get the run of the place again."

"Then you never heard of him?"

"Never in my life," said Arthur.

"He knows nothing," thought Miss Raylock; and she began to get impatient. "Have you any influence over your aunt the Princess?" she said.

"A little. But what degree of influence?"

"Can you prevent her doing a silly thing?"

"No. Can you?"

"I don't want repartee; I want sense. Can you prevent her going to Upton, or going to Italy, or

going to Vienna? Can you prevent your father from maundering and daundering down in his idleness to that foolish college? There, you are no use whatever; but can you take a message? Give Mr. Betts my most respectful compliments, and tell him that I expect him here to tea at five o'clock to-morrow. I have not the honour of his acquaintance, I allow; but there, I am a lone unprotected woman, and this interview has been scandalously long. If our dear neighbours say anything unpleasant about it, remember, on your honour, that it was of your seeking. Go along with you, Master Oxford, and don't tread on my flower-beds. Send me Betts, will you? Send me Betts."

CHAPTER II.

IN WHICH DORA DISCOVERS A SECRET.

THE beds at Silcotes were more comfortable than the beds of St. Mary's; and, besides, there was no eight o'clock chapel there, and indeed no apology or substitute for anything of the sort. Arthur, in his earlier and more vigorous development, had certainly tried prayers, but habit had been against him, and had beaten even him. Nay, the great English institution of breakfast was in that establishment a mere form so diluted that, when the house was full of such people as still cared to go there for the shooting, it was merely changed, by a little vigorous action on the part of the butler, into lunch. No times were kept in that house before seven o'clock, and then woe be to the man who was late down to dinner and cared for soup.

I believe that the first thing which an English schoolboy looks forward to, when he comes to you for the holidays, is a regular good lie in bed of a morning. Ask the next young gentleman you have over to spend his vacation with you at what hour he would wish to be called. If I am wrong he will no doubt correct me. And again your sailor fresh from a voyage, or your traveller pressed for time, will confirm the schoolboy as to the great fact that there is nothing like bed of a morning. Charles Lamb again, a man from whom I am informed there is no appeal just now, goes with them, or I should say went with them, and lay abed till he chose to get up.

It was therefore perfectly natural for James to lie long and sleep heavily the morning after the storm, and when he awoke it was with a start, and with his old keen swift look around him, for he felt in his sleep that some one was looking at him, and lo, the Squire himself sitting on the bed, and holding in his hand a large clumsy key.

"Hallo!" cried the Squire, "you can't have much on your conscience if you sleep like that. I have been staring at you ever so long. I am going out

all day, and so I have brought you the key of your old cottage."

"Thank you, sir," said James.

"Yes," said Silcote. "I have kept it locked up ever since she went. I had a great respect for your mother. A downright plain-spoken woman, but a lady, a perfect lady. Do you see much of her now?"

"I have never seen her, sir, since the day she left me at school."

"So she has stuck to her resolution," thought the Squire; "a most remarkable woman! She has taken what I said somewhat too literally,—Do you ever hear from her?"

"Once every year, just merely telling me to be steady, and saying we shall meet some day."

"And where is she, and what is she doing?"

"I have no idea."

"Indeed! was there no postmark on the letter?"

"Only London, sir. I suppose you don't happen to know where they are? I should like to see my father again."

"Very creditable. But I have no idea. A few days after you went to school they came to the steward

with their key, carrying heavy bundles. And they walked off eastward, and were lost in a mist, and from that time to this not a word has been heard of them. Do you think you would remember her?"

"I am very doubtful of it, sir. And I fear she would not know me."

Silcote laughed. "Not much fear of that," he said. "But I will go. I have one of my riding fits on, and shan't be at home before dinner. By the by, if you were to bring your mind to bear on getting up it might be as well, for it is past eleven," and, laying the key on the bed, he went away.

James came thoughtfully down stairs, and found that the breakfast-room was empty, and that the others had all breakfasted and dispersed; there was only one plate laid, and on it a letter addressed to him.

It was in an easy running business hand, with boldly emphatic initial letters and tails. It was as follows :—

"HONOURED SIR,—Thinking that it would save time if you would kindly put me in possession of the

address of your mother, Mrs. Sugden, I venture to ask you for it. I go to London by the next train; and so perhaps you will be so good as to telegraph it to my employers, Messrs. Barret and Hall, Lincoln's Inn Fields. I see now that I was wrong not to have asked you for it last night, when we stood face to face; but I was a little put out by finding she had left Beechwood. Apologising for giving you so much trouble through my neglect,

"I remain,

"Your most obedient

and humble servant,

"GEORGE THOMPSON."

His old friend, the young servant, evidently detailed for the service by collusion with the butler, brought in breakfast alone. This breakfast was a most sumptuous and elaborate piece of business. Silcote had taken a fancy to this youth, and probably gave some hint about his being royally entertained: at all events, he was so entertained, and with no one but his old friend to wait on him. His first act, I am happy to say, on seeing the coast perfectly clear, was to shake

hands with his old friend, and look at him admiringly. They then lapsed into conversation.

"Who brought this letter, Joe?" he asked.

"A messenger from the Red Lion at Newby, the first thing this morning."

"It is to ask about my mother's address," said James.

"You had best send it to them at once. He is a lawyer's clerk, and seems to have come, in the first instance, after Miss Lee. But, when he found he was close to Beechwood, he drove down to the Bull, late as it was, and knocked them up, asking where Mrs. Sugden lived. And they told him they didn't know, and that nobody knew; for that she and her husband had been gone away this five year. And then he cussed owdacious, he did. And he had sixpenn'orth of rum hot, and he give the driver half a pint of beer, and he got in and he drove off, cussing like one o'clock. Your mother has come into some property, in my opinion; and you had best let them lawyers know where she is, or they'll put the whole of it into Chancery, to make business; and then a fine lot your mother will ever see of it. Eat some

more of that omelette ; and don't let out that we was familiar together. Hogworth " (the butler) "warned me that he'd like to catch me at it; and he is a tartar. But I have been doing on it all the same, you see. So long as you don't mind, I'll chance all about he."

"*I mind, old fellow?*" said James, quickly; "do you take me for a snob?"

"Never a bit," said the other. "Only I must say, in self-defence, that you do look the gentleman all over. And so I was a bit scared. There! Now, how is your mother? Your mother was a kind and good woman to me."

"*I don't know,*" replied James. "I have never set eyes on her since the day I went to school."

"Never seen your mother! Well, I suppose we all get over that sort of thing in time. Why, I never see a boy that hankered after his mother more than what you did. Not that you ever wanted pluck, any more than me. Do you remember your turn up with Bates of the Blue Lion, the time his gang came after the Squire's pheasants, and found Captain Tom at home and your father awake?"

"I remember," said James.

"Pluck don't go by a chap's caring for his mother. I have had two or three fights; one only three months ago over *that* question. But I thought you was—so to put it—in that line yourself."

How little had he thought of her? Less, actually, than the Squire. One cannot give names to every phase of human passion. One can only speak of what one knows, and it would be well for the advance of human knowledge if every one were as honest as that. If one speaks of a sentimental fact, however immensely important, one will be accused of sentimentalism. It must be done, however. There came on this lad, James, all in one moment, a gush of intense tenderness for his mother. (I use the words handiest to me.) His remembrance of his mother came on him suddenly, and seemed to flood his soul; but the flood never poured out of his eyes. He was not of the crying sort. He walked out on the terrace perfectly dry-eyed. But there was a pang, a spasm at his heart, which told him that he had most basely forgotten the pleasantest companion, the wisest friend, the most loving overlooker of defects, the most gentle, kindly, and honest

critic, that ever man had. He had forgotten his mother: and here was Dora, advancing from among the flower beds,—good honest Dora—perfectly ready to take her place.

This boy and girl were very fond of one another. Boys and girls do get very fond of one another even at that early age; but we have not much to do with that; we have more to do with older folk. So much we must say, however—that Dora was determined to spend a long day in his company, and found him in this low and most properly penitential frame of mind about his mother. She had expected to find him in a holiday mood, charmed and full of wonder at the glories of Silcotes, ready to give up the day to her, and wander away, sketching and romancing, from the highest point of the forest to the swampiest island on the river. He was prepared to do nothing of the kind, but told her everything, and then proposed to her to go with him and look at the old cottage. She encouraged him in his mood, pointed out to him how heartlessly he had behaved, and consented to undertake the pilgrimage to the old cottage, of which he held the key in his hand. Did she know that this bright-eyed young

artist-lad was one of the most charming companions in the world? Did she know that he had a shrewd tongue in his head, and that she was a little bit afraid of it? Did she rejoice at getting an advantage over him, and having quieted his tongue for one day at least; getting him in his best and most sentimental mood? All this is quite possible, because she was a very clever young lady indeed. She immediately agreed to go to the old cottage with him.

A very sharp, shrewd, and keen young lady indeed, with a naturally quick intellect, with great personal courage and determination, all of which qualities had been considerably sharpened by the hand-to-mouth life she had led in her father's house at Lancaster Square,—pure, noble, good in every way, yet not without *knowledge* of evil. A girl brought up by a Miss Lee, among housemaids, is *not* without a knowledge of evil, although they may hate evil more deeply than if they were ignorant of it.

Did you ever see a deserted cottage? Samuel Reade has given us more than one deserted mansion: and pathetic and beautiful they are indeed. But to me (possibly because I have been connected with the

artisan and labouring class so intimately all my life), a deserted cottage is more romantic than a deserted mansion. The desolation of the Tinley Hall estate is one thing, the ruin of a small cottage is another. The revenues of the Tinley estate still are paid in by the farmers, and there are heirs, and the property will recover, and a new house will be built. There is hope there. But in a deserted cottage the element of hope is wanting. A new six-roomed brick one may be built, and it will be better for all parties, but the old folks are gone—to the workhouse. One seldom sees such a thing within a hundred miles of London, but one does sometimes. Again, when you see a deserted cottage you see that you have come to the very lowest verge of ruin. The hare is very near the hearthstone.

One seldom sees such a thing on the most neglected estate; but these two young people saw one that day, and it was a great contrast to the well-kept gardens of Silcotes. The garden was a jungle. The roses had grown until they could flower no longer; the lilies had spread out from their roots till they were scarcely more than a mass of yellow flowerless vegetation; the lavender was represented by a few sticks; while the

tea-shrub had tangled itself over the porch, until it had broken the frail wood, and made it necessary to lower your head as you put the key in the door.

"It is awfully lonely here," said James. "I knew every plant and flower ; they were like living things to me. And now they are all stretching out their arms at us, and speaking. Do you hear them?"

"No. What do they say?"

"Neglect! Neglect!"

"Quite right, if they do," said Dora. "You are getting foolish, getting too artistic. Open the door, and let me in!"

"I am afraid," said James.

"Well, I am with you, and I am certainly not afraid. What are you afraid of?"

"Suppose, when you opened that door, and went into that deserted house, you were to see my mother standing waiting for us beside the cold hearth? What effect would that have on you, Dora?"

"Well, I suppose I should be frightened out of my wits. But I'll chance it; all the more because I know that nothing of the kind is at all likely to take place."

"Do you believe in ghosts?"

"I am sorry to say I do. It is very lamentable and humiliating; but, if my Aunt Mary had been your aunt, you would do the same."

"I believe that we shall see my mother's ghost the moment we enter that door," said James.

"But she isn't dead," said Dora.

"That doesn't matter," said James.

"Doesn't it?" said Dora. "Well, there is one way out of the difficulty. Give me the key, and let me go in first. You are actually frightening me now, with your nonsense. Give me the key, and let us go in. I am ashamed of you."

She took the key from him, and with a little difficulty opened the door, and they passed in together. There was no ghost to be seen. A certain kind of spider, which I have never been able to identify, had spun great webs in every available part of the little kitchen. Likewise there was a toad, who cast his beautiful eyes up to these two beautiful young creatures, as if asking what they, in all the power of their youth and their beauty, meant to do with him, the careful old keeper of this neglected house.

Dust—dull grey dust, everywhere; on the floor, on

the solitary dresser, the last of the fixtures, on the jambs of the windows, everywhere. A dull grey colour of dust, like discoloured London snow, settled down over everything; a grey dust which had toned down everything like vivid colour everywhere, except in one place. Among the grey ashes of the long-cold hearth lay irregular pieces of paper, some only torn, some half-burnt. And Dora saw them; and she spread herself before the fireplace to the full expanse of her crinoline, and she said—

“James, my dear, where is the little room in which you were sleeping when you were roused by the poachers? You remember. Our first introduction, you know. I should very, very much like to see it.”

“Up aloft here, and then turn to the right,” said James. “Come up, and let me show you the old place.”

“I am a little tired,” said Dora, “and should like to sit still. Go up yourself; I think, under the circumstances, that it would be better for you to go up alone. You may come down and fetch me up when you choose.”

He had hardly got on the first stair when she began

to turn over the half torn, half burnt letters which lay amidst the ashes. She was shrewd and keen, and had heard the servants talk and joke, both at Silcotes and Lancaster Square. The first glance at these letters showed her that there was a mystery here for which she was utterly unprepared. The letters were all in one handwriting—not by any means the handwriting she had expected to find—for it was not her grandfather's. They were in the large bold hand of her uncle Thomas ; and were many of them signed by his name. The ink was yellow by time, but there stood unmistakeably the words, "Your ever loving Tom Silcote," in her uncle's handwriting.

CHAPTER III.

AND KEEPS IT TO HERSELF.

"AND," thought out poor Dora, while James was lumbering about overhead, "if he ever finds out this truth, he is a ruined man for life. I'll burn them all."

One must do her the credit to say that she was a wonderfully shrewd and determined girl. There was no chance of getting fire within half a mile. James was in a very sentimental mood about his mother; and she knew that the moment he noticed these old letters he would wish to read them. Yet she, without fire, was entirely determined that they should be burnt without being read.

He came slowly down after a little while, and she began at him.

"How dreadfully close the room smells: like a vault."

"But there are no dead men here," said James. Your nose is too aristocratic, Dora. *We* are well enough used to this close smell."

"And to low fever," replied Dora. "Fudge; don't begin the dramatic repartee style of conversation just now. I say that the place smells like a vault. And so it does. You say that there are no dead men here, but there are dead folks' memories. Dead folks had much better be burnt. When I die I shall go in for incremation."

"You had better go in for it before, or you will find it too late. Who is talking nonsense now?" asked James.

"I am; but that is no business of yours. The place smells of dead folks' bones, and I hate the smell. I wish you would light your pipe, James. Don't say you have not got one, because I know better."

"I thought you did not like smoking?"

"I like it here. Light your pipe, and let us have a comfortable talk. And it is cold. Cannot we light a fire?"

James, like most schoolboys in these days, was provided with a pipe, tobacco, and matches. He very

soon lit his pipe, and began smoking. When he had smoked for a minute or two he said—

“I always thought you spoke the truth.”

“So I do,” said Dora, looking sadly guilty.

“As in the present instance,” said James. “Well, I have lit my pipe, which was the first thing you asked me to do; and, as for the second, I will do it for you directly. You want a little fire to warm you. I will make it with those half torn, half burnt letters of my mother’s which are lying among the ashes, and about which you have been trying to deceive me.”

There was not much which was romantic about Dora. “The only fat Silcote since the Fall,” Miss Raylock called her once. But “the only fat Silcote since the Fall” did become, on this occasion, somewhat romantic and powerful. This is the spectacle of a fat good-natured girl, standing before a fireplace, and scolding a schoolboy; but hear what she said, with her finger pointed at him, as he lounged against the table smoking, and then judge.

“You are right about my having tried to deceive you, and my having failed. You are right about those letters referring to your mother, but you shall never

see them, and for two reasons :—first, because I will prevent you by sheer force ; and, secondly, because you daren't look at them. How dare you read your mother's letters ?”

The pipe was put out now ; but he threw a box of matches on the damp brick floor at Dora's feet, and went out.

He waited for her outside in the beech wood, and they walked together, down hill, towards the river side by side, silent for a time. He spoke first, for she was resolute in silence.

“ What was in those letters ?”

“ How should I know ?” said Dora.

“ Did not you read them, then ?”

“ I am not in the habit of reading other people's letters. I may be deceitful, but I never do that.”

“ Then why did you keep me from seeing them ?”

“ Because on every ground it was infinitely less your business than any one else's. And, mind you, I have been accused of deceit to-day, and I don't like it. It is not a pleasant thing, you know, and you shall have the truth in future, I promise you. But I knew the handwriting, and I was determined that you should

not see it. How much do you like that? We were brought into the world, James, to disagree, and I think only to love one another the better for our disagreements. We have been brought up in hard schools, James, and we must make the best of one another. Now for the river."

They got a boat, these two, and rowed together miles and miles down the pleasant reaches, and among the beautiful islands of the river. And Dora, who had thus early made it part of the scheme of her life to know everything and do everything, must, among other things, learn to row. And James had to teach her, and steer, which, on the whole, was very pleasant. When she looked out of the boat to see how her sculls were getting on, he would say, "Eyes in the boat now; look at me." When she, in her pains-taking efforts bit her lower lip, he said, "Don't make faces; put your mouth straight, you know, and look at me;" and she pouted her mouth out prettily enough, and looked at him. And when he said, "Now mind about the feathering; when you are at your furthest point forward, turn your wrists just a quarter of a circle, so," she said—

"Thank you very much" Verbal instructions are

quite sufficient. You are not my uncle Arthur any more than I am Miss Lee. And you are not teaching me to play chants on the schoolroom piano."

And James said "Oho!" and relinquished the practical part of his task.

And Dora said "Oho!" also.

And James said, "And so he teaches her chants on the schoolroom piano, does he?"

"No, he don't," said Dora.

"I thought you said he 'does.' That is seven places down for grammar, by jingo."

"I did not," said Dora.

"Why!——"

"Why?" snatched up Dora, "because she won't let him. He *did* a year or less ago. But she won't have it now. Can you keep a secret?"

"No; but you had better tell it to me, for you know you cannot keep it to yourself."

"Well," said Dora, complacently, "I suppose I can't. If I could I should certainly not have invited you to share it. But *I* believe that Miss Lee has turned Roman Catholic."

"I say, Dora," said James, aghast; "think what an

awful thing you are saying. You have no right to bring such an awful accusation against anybody without clear proof, you know."

"I don't bring any accusations. I only say what I think," said Dora, attending carefully to her sculling, and hitting herself severely in the ribs every third time she brought her sculls out of the water. "I say what *I* think: I always did; and as far as any poor silly idle purposeless mortal like you or me can predict, I always mean to. *I* believe that she has turned Roman Catholic."

"Why?"

"Well, 'why' is a short sentence. I believe it is customary in society to address a lady in something more than a monosyllable. My answer is that we will change the conversation. It appears that the same lawyer's clerk is looking up her and your mother at the same time. I wonder what those two can have been doing."

"Now, Beatrix!"

"Now, Benedict. Come, let us leave sharpening our silly little wits on one another. How are the new buildings at St. Mary's getting on?"

"Keep your eyes in the boat. I am lord and master here. They are going on very well."

"My eyes?"

"No, the buildings. I thought you were going to leave sharpening your silly little wits on me. Aha! my lady. The buildings are going on very well, I believe. They have made a confounded mess about the place with their bricks and mortar, and have dug some holes. But Chaos before Cosmos, you know."

"Gracious!" said Dora; "what long words we are getting to use!"

"Not at all," said James; "they are quite short. Mind your rowing."

CHAPTER IV.

THE FINAL DEVELOPMENT OF ST. MARY'S.

"LOOK at your cucumbers and marrows again, for instance," said Mr. Betts to the Squire on one occasion ; "you put a thing like a little piece of deal chip into the ground, and in two months your head gardener comes to you and tells you that your marrow vine has got over the wall into the neighbour's garden, and that the neighbour objects, being serious, on the score of temptation. I was thinking of my own little crib in Islington, then, but the truth remains the same, Squire. An idea is like a vegetable marrow. It grows and develops so uncommon quick, that before you can look round, you find your serious neighbour going about with you quite savage, on the score of temptation. I illustrate this to you as a metaphor, Squire. I took up with this idea of St. Mary's Hospital quite

casually. But it has grown on my hands until it has overgrown the neighbour's walls. Sir Hugh Brockliss is grumbling again."

"Confound the ass!" said Silcote.

"Not at all," said Betts. "Although by your influence I have just been carried in triumphantly to the office of treasurer, and am provided for handsomely for life: and although I take this opportunity of giving you my most sincere thanks—but there's a pair of us, ain't there? You like the receiving of thanks as little as I like giving 'em—although Sir Hugh may be an ass, and, in regard to barts. generally, I hold that they are neither the one thing nor the other: yet still I say, don't confound him. He don't want any confounding. What he may have to learn from you I don't know—I ain't a gentleman: but you have a great deal to learn from him. And, what is much more important, we want his name. In what I am going to do, we want a good name, and his is a good one. Not first-class you say, but still it is one which will go down, for want of a better, with the High Church Liberals; and unless we get them we had better put the money into the Illinois Central."

"What the deuce are you going to do with me now?" said Silcote.

"Sir Hugh Brockliss," continued Mr. Betts, "has got a good and most respectable name, and we must have it. Therefore you be civil to him: at least, as civil as you can manage. We must have one tolerably respectable name. I should like a bigger one than his, but we haven't got it, and must do the job with the materials. He is all against the whole thing, but he is, as you so shrewdly said, an ass, and will believe the last thing that is said to him. And so I want you to be civil to him, because I intend to go into the moderately High Church business; it is the paying one, Squire, and I mean to make this thing pay. And for that we want names, and his name is the only respectable one we have got."

"There is mine," said the Squire; "is *that* no use?"

"Lor' bless you," said Betts, "a deal worse than no name at all. It's a lucky thing for you, Squire, that your father was born before you. If you had had to grub about for your own fortune, you would be in No. 1A, Queer Street, just now. A name is a marketable thing in England, as any fool knows; but you

have made such a mess of your name that I, even I, can't discount it, and am obliged to discount Sir Hugh Brockliss' instead of you."

"You rather maze me, Betts. What have I done?"

"Done? Nothing; about the worst thing you could do in these steam-engine days; and talked a heap of nonsense the while."

"As a matter of curiosity, my dear Betts, may I ask you what you wish me to do?"

"I wish you to be civil to Sir Hugh Brockliss. We must have a name, and yours is no good."

"I submit to you. I will be civil to Sir Hugh Brockliss. Any further directions?"

"There is another bart. whose property, as they say, 'impinges' on ours at St. Mary's, who ought to be conciliated. Do you know his name?"

"No."

"Then I don't; for the nonce."

"Now, sir," growled Silcote.

"Furthermore," said Betts, "I think it would be much better if you left off going to the Board. I do, indeed."

"And why for instance?"

"There are many reasons," said Betts. "It is a long way, for instance; and again——"

"And, again, Sir Godfrey Mallory is come back, and you and Miss Raylock don't think that it is right for me to run the chance of coming against him. What asses you people are! Women of course think, and always will, that they can set wrong things right by advice. That is nothing new. They will have power somehow, as the Wife of Bath knew. But look at yourself. Do you know what you are? You are a bankrupt stockbroker, a man whom I have made over again. You owe me everything, and five minutes ago you were prepared to take possession of me, body and bones, and order me about like a schoolboy. I took you up, because you pleased me: if you cease to please me, I shall put you down again. Have the goodness to understand that I am master, and you are servant. Have you brains enough for that?"

"I didn't mean any offence, sir."

"A fox don't mean any offence. But he gives it. He can't help it. Now look you here. You have been alluding to Sir Godfrey Mallory."

"I never mentioned his name, sir."

"How I could make you lie, if I took the trouble! You know you mentioned him, and, while you were in your bantam-cock vein, you said you did not know his name 'for the nonce.' Now you mind what you are about. If you ever dare to go into, in any way, my relations with that man, I'll smash you. That is plain enough, is it not?"

It certainly was.

"And I'll have no colloquing with that old Miss Raylock. She has never had anything to do in her lifetime but mind other folks' business, and, when she found anything worth writing about, to hang up her neighbours before the public, for about five hundred pounds apiece. She is living on the proceeds of her wicked old iniquity now. The interest in me, and in her knowledge of my inconceivable wrongs, is enough to pay her butcher and baker at this day. And, again, I'll have no colloquing with my sister. She may, or may not, be a fool, but she is my sister. And I will not have you in communication with Kriegsthum. I am perfectly aware that your connexion with him began in some queer business about foreign bonds, but it must end now. I don't know that I have any

more hints to give you at present, but, when I have, you shall get them hot and heavy. Stay, one more, Old Raylock, or my sister, or some fool, has evidently given you some notion about my former domestic relations. Now, leave these matters alone, will you? You don't know how to handle such matters. On one or two occasions I have seen you speak up like a man for my eldest son Algernon. I liked you for that. But, once for all, understand, that you are too coarse a hand to touch on any domestic relations of mine. Now go on. You have some scheme on hand. Go on."

"Well, sir, that is rather difficult, after your late outbreak."

"Difficult! I suppose it *is* difficult; but I never said that a beaten dog hunted free. You have had the travel taken out of you, have you? There, let us leave quarrelling. I have ten times your brains, and fifty times your determination. And I have venison, champagne, a most neat sort of sherry, considerable influence, and a strong personal liking for yourself. In exchange for all these good things I merely ask you to amuse me, and to let things, which a man

in your position can't in the least understand, alone. Amuse me, therefore. What is this wonderful scheme of yours? Let us have it."

Mr. Betts unfolded it to him, and we will do so to the reader.

"Oh, but he is a brimstone," Mr. Betts remarked in confidence to Algernon afterwards. "I went a ha'porth too far, and didn't I *catch* it! All our tongues are unruly members, I am given to understand. But Smith O'Brien ain't a more unruly member than his. I know I ain't going to run the risk of it *again*."

It will have been seen, from the above conversation, that Mr. Betts was now treasurer of St. Mary's. The old treasurer having, as Mr. Betts expressed it, "dropped," and the Silcote influence, since the retirement in dudgeon of Sir Hugh Brockliss, being supreme, Mr. Betts had been appointed. Sir Hugh described the business as a shameful job, which rather made Betts wince. Because, if Sir Hugh could not swallow *that*, if he called *that* a job, what on earth would he say when the enormous, gigantic, and audacious job which was then just being matured in the stock-

broking brain of Mr. Betts was unfolded to him, as it must be in the course of business?

However, there he was, treasurer, and a most splendid treasurer he made. As the Squire himself most truly said to the Board, "You could not have got another man in all England so good for the same money." He was a most excellent man of business.

But he was more. If he was one thing more than another, he was a speculator. His splendid knowledge of finance had prevented him making more than one false step in his life. And for years after his bankruptcy he was a shipwrecked, poor man; a man who felt mean; and again still meaner whenever any of his feeble little schemes went wrong, as they did, for want of money. But the moment he found himself in a high position again, the moment he had the handling of considerable sums of money, the old passion revived.

The man had poetry in him somewhere, and it found vent in the only way it could. The man's education will always be used to bring out the poetry which may happen to be in him. Look at Quentin Matsys.

Betts had had but one education, the education of money. The poetry in the man, the creative power, was forced to express itself in money. To *make* three or four sovereigns out of one—to *make* a fortune—was his kind of *poetry*. He didn't *want* the money. He did not want the money's worth. He only wanted to use what seemed to him a creative faculty, and *make* it. Look round and see if I am not right. Are the money-makers money-spenders? And are they ever contented till they are in their coffins, any more than a poet is contented with verse-making until his hand is too feeble to hold the pen?

His idea was this:—the revenues of St. Mary's were little inferior to those of Eton. The demand for good schools was just setting in. Why should he not make St. Mary's the greatest school in England? He determined that he would try.

All this was perfectly fair. Betts was only a specimen of one kind of British merchant, the kind who can't have the handling of money without trying to "turn it over." He now, after many years, found the beloved cash passing through his fingers once more. The old stockjobbing instinct, the poetry

of the man, developed again suddenly. He did not care for money's worth. His salary was good; and out of it he assisted Algernon to pay part of his lawyer's bills (Algernon having been prosecuted by his churchwardens for lighting seven candles on his communion-table before dark. He said it was dark, and the churchwardens' people said it wasn't; and "it went against" Algernon). Betts did not in the least care about his own money, but he most particularly liked handling that of other people. He knocked up a splendid scheme for making St. Mary's greater than Eton, and it was to a certain extent successful.

There was no difficulty with the Board about it. The Silcote influence was high. The more intelligent members of the Board knew perfectly well that Betts had done well for the charity in helping to get it moved into the country, and also that his was the greatest arithmetical head among them. He was their Napoleon, and had earned the right to be entrusted with armies. And this man would give them prestige, by getting up a bigger thing, in which their names should have the old predominance. There was no difficulty with the Board at all, so far. Sir Hugh

Brockliss himself, so far as this part of the business was concerned, behaved himself like a courteous and highbred lamb, with a great power of bowing. "The spread of a sound education was one of the things nearest to his heart. He had never been thrown against commercial complications himself; but he had no doubt that perfectly blameless people were sometimes seriously affected by them. His general rule in life had been to hold out the hand of fellowship to any member of the community pointed at by the finger of scorn. Whether it was advisable that any member of a Board should use his undoubted influence to get a member of his own family, or, to speak more correctly, his son's father-in-law, appointed to a post of trust in which"—and then he mazed himself in a labyrinth of grammar, and broke his shins among involved sentences, leaving the Board with the impression that he was a good-natured old ass. As indeed he was. The Board determined to build on to the school, and to make it, if possible, the greatest school in England.

But this was not the job which Betts had in his head. Silcote accepted all this with perfect com-

placency, when he had once scolded Betts into submission. Betts had dreaded Sir Hugh Brockliss as the great enemy. But, after he had got the last taste of the Squire's tongue, had seen that the devil in Silcote was not always dumb, he began to see that Silcote himself might turn against the job : for one reason, if no other—that Algernon was involved in it. But he was an obstinate man, of the same breed of man who waited at Waterloo till the Prussians came up. He wanted the thing done, and he did it in his own way—defiant and obstinate.

“You agree with all we have said. Now the question arises about the head master. We must have a first-class man for head master ; we must, to make it pay you know ; a first-class man. A Hertford scholar, you know, a man of mark :—a man whose name in an advertisement before leader will be like the unfolding of a banner. Now you'll have to pay such a man as this. Through the nose.”

“I suppose we must,” said Silcote.

“I suppose you must also. But then I have calculated every halfpenny, and we haven't got the money to pay him.”

"I ain't going to find the money, if you mean that," said Silcote.

"I don't mean anything of the kind," said Betts. "Taisez, Taisez. I have been in a general way knocking round and asking questions."

"Is Kriegsthurm your man?"

"No, Kriegsthurm ain't. But I find, going into details, that the man we want as head master can't be got under twelve hundred a-year. Not the man we want can't. And we must pension the present old man who calls himself head master, with five hundred a year. And I can't find the money."

"Then you must drop the scheme till you can," said the Squire.

"Why no," said Betts. "I know a man up to every requirement, who could do it for seven hundred and fifty."

"Snap him up, then."

"I have. Do you care to know his name? It is Arthur Silcote."

"Do you mean that Arthur has lent himself to this job?"

"Yes, I do. And this ain't half of it. As for Arthur, he wants rest, and he will get it here."

"Will he?" said Silcote.

"I told you you had not heard half of the business. You must have ever so many more masters. Now, I know of one who would suit exactly. Not a first-class man, but a good man enough, and accustomed to tuition."

"My dear friend, let me have his name, without any more beating about the bush. Do go straight at it."

"Algernon Silcote, my son-in-law."

The Squire stood mute.

"You are a bold man, Betts: but this is too bold. The Brockliss party won't stand it, man. The world won't stand it. I, the chairman of the Board, get my son's father-in-law appointed as treasurer—as treasurer—and immediately appoint one of my sons as head master, and another second master! It won't do; I cannot consent. We shall have the *Times* down on us. I admire your audacity, but it won't do."

"Arthur is going to send in his testimonials, and you must give it him. No man within miles of him will apply at such a salary. You can't oppose *him*.

And if you stand in your eldest son's light it will be attributed to wrong motives. He is going to send in *his* testimonials, and, if you give the weight of your name against your own son, worse things will be said of you than if you jobbed him into fifty places. There are those who think him an ill-used man already. But, if you change your passive neglect into open and active hostility, and stand between him and his poor children's bread, you will have worse things said of you than anything the *Times* will over the mere matter of a small job like this. And, lor! it is nothing!"

"Not to you, perhaps," said the Squire, laughing, "but I am not so used to this sort of thing. I suppose it will look a little less disgraceful and preposterous when I get a little more used to it. But about Mr. Silcote. What has he been doing? I thought his church was full."

"That is just where it is, Squire. He can't do without me. I must have him under my own eye; I can't trust him out of my sight. No sooner did I begin to stay here, no sooner was my back turned, than he goes to Oxford, and stays with his old friends. I've seen him tending to it for a long time. He began

Lowish enough Church, you know, but all the old college friends he really ever cared for were High Church, and he has come round to 'em at last. I warned him of it. I spoke seriously to him. I pointed out to him the danger and error of such a course; that it led to the still more degrading superstitions of Rome; that his church was not adapted for it, being what you may call of an orthodox style of architecture; that his congregation hated M.B. like poison; and that the thing had never been made to pay commercially. But I couldn't make him see it. Not being a religious man yourself, Squire, I hope I give no offence in saying that it is very difficult to make really religious men see things in a commercial point of view."

"Oh, you couldn't, eh?" said the Squire, shaking his great chest with internal laughter at the mental spectacle of Betts trying to argue Algernon out of his religious convictions on commercial grounds. "So he wouldn't listen to you, eh?"

"Not a bit of it," said Betts. "I knew he would make a mess of it if I didn't stay by him. I saw he was getting bent on it; and consequently I knew he'd do it sooner or later; for his name is Silcote you

know,—that's about what his name is. And the last words I said to him were: 'If you find that your mind leads you to it,' I said, 'I suppose you must do it. But,' I said, 'let 'em down easy. Preach up to it cautious,' I said. 'If it's the right thing,' I said, 'go in for it; though as a last word it hasn't took in the north part of London, and is against my own principles; but, whether it's right or wrong, there is no harm in making it pay in a commercial point of view. Lor' bless you,' I said, 'I have made many things pay in my time, and, if you give me time, I may make this; though no one has yet. Now I am going to your father' (meaning you), 'and, if you are determined, begin preaching up to it cautious.'"

"I hope he followed your advice," said the Squire, laughing more kindly than he had done for thirty years.

"My advice!" said Betts, utterly unconscious of the amusement he was causing. "Isn't he a Silcote? He preached in his surplice the first Sunday I was away. Ah! I'm telling you the bare truth: he turns the chairs towards the altar, and he calls *that* letting 'em down easy. What on earth are you laughing at? I don't see anything to laugh at."

"I won't laugh any more if I can help it; but, good Betts, has his course been successful? Won't he let his pews better in consequence of this ceremonialism?"

"I tell you that that sort of thing don't suit our Islington folks all of a sudden. They want letting down easy, and he has gone and let 'em down by the run. And he has emptied his church. And he must have this master's place; and, if you get out of it with that, without my coming on you for a couple of hundred pounds to pay his tradesmen and his doctor, you may think yourself lucky."

"But he is a Puseyite, Betts," said Silcote, as soon as he had smothered his internal laughter; "and, according to your own confession, Puseyism don't pay; and our own apology to human decency, for the outrageous job in which we are both concerned, will be to make it pay. This Algernon Silcote is a marked Puseyite; they have left his church, and the boys have cast squibs and crackers into his area. We shall ruin the whole thing if we take a man half-way to Rome into the business."

"And how will you get out of that, I wonder?" thought the Squire as he stood behind Betts, with a

more genial light in his eyes than any one could remember to have seen before. "This is fun, and seems to rattle one's heart about pleasantly. How will you, you kind old rogue, make this thing fit?"

The kindly old rogue was blessed in resource; he had only to bite his finger in silence for less than one minute, when he found himself able to push towards his idea through a vague skirmishing army of common-places.

"Why, there's various ways of looking at things, Squire; what's treason in one place is patriotism in another. In a similar way what is orthodoxy in a cathedral is Puseyism in a church. Architecture has a deal to do with it; and we are going in for the highest style of architecture procurable for money. Close imitation of the old buildings. Real mediæval, none of your renaissance, tag-rag, and bobbery. Lor' bless you, his surplice won't be noticed in *our* chapel! Why we chant the Psalms now, and Algernon will go in for everything short of incense, and we are safe with *him*, you know. And there is a further consideration for your not opposing Algernon's nomination as master."

"And what is that?" asked Silcote.

"This," said Betts, suddenly and furiously, in a way which strangely startled the Squire; "just because, if this man Algernon Silcote is kicked out in the cold to starve with his children, by George, I'll pitch the whole thing to the devil. If he has to beg, by George, I'll beg alongside of him. If he has to go to the workhouse, I'll go to the workhouse with him; if he has to stand in the dock, I'll stand alongside of him. He will never take a penny from me. And he sees it out with me through thick and thin; through a bitterer time than *you've* ever seen, Come! And by George, I'll see it out with him to the end and finish of it all. If I don't, may ——"

"Hush, my friend, hush!" said Silcote, laying his hand very gently on Mr. Betts's shoulder. "Don't scold and swear. You have scolded yourself into tears during a business conversation. How very un-businesslike! Be quiet; I will do everything you wish for this gentleman. He was my late wife's son, you know. Now that I see what you are, I will tell it all to you some day. Not now. Let one man make a fool of himself at a time. Now have you got any other officers in your eye, you audacious old

schemer? Won't you appoint me shoeblack, and request Sir Hugh Brockliss to undertake the office of scavenger?"

Betts laughed. "Well, now it's over, we may as well have a little talk to get it out of our heads. Officers? Ah, we want a new matron, and had better see to it at the next Board. Old Mrs. Jones is past her work. She will be swallowing her spectacles soon. I've had to advertise without waiting for the Board. You will pension her, of course!"

"Of course."

"And Berry? He ought to be pensioned, you know."

"He'll last. How about the matron?"

"One application, which seems likely. Splendid certificates, but belongs to a sisterhood."

"That won't do. We can't have a Roman Catholic woman with a wimple about the place."

"She wears no dress, and, I believe, takes no vows, and she is a Protestant. She is evidently a tip-top person. If you don't object, she ought to be snapped up."

"Is she used to this kind of thing?"

"She has been used to everything pretty nigh, from her testimonials. She was in the Crimea to begin with. The doctors at the Small-pox Hospital at Manchester wrote and asked for her, but the lady superintendent writes to me to say that she has set her heart on this. You had best have her."

"She will be better than a Gamp, I suppose. I see no difficulty. Large salary?"

"Lor' bless you, her sort don't take money. She must be decently found, but she musn't be offered money. That was expressly mentioned."

"We will have her in, my Betts, What is her name?"

"Mrs. Morgan. *They* call her Sister Mary, but she is to be called Mrs. Morgan if she comes to us."

CHAPTER V.

MRS. MORGAN.

I BELIEVE that Mr. Betts, in his ignorance, actually thought that Arthur's work at St. Mary's would be lighter than that at Balliol. It is impossible that Arthur could have thought so, but he may have thought that some change in the form of his eager activity would amount to a kind of rest: for of rest, consisting of actual quiescence, he was utterly incapable. It was known to but very few, of whom his father was one, that on several occasions he had fainted. The first doctor he had consulted on this alarming symptom had spoken so very gravely of the symptoms that he had found it necessary at last to tell his father, which he did the day before James arrived at Silcote. Another doctor, however, had given a more cheering

account; there had been no recurrence of the symptoms; and here he was fairly installed lord and master of the new *regime*.

His buildings were not quite finished, but his boys were due. He had been three days there, and in those three days there had been some fifty waking hours: and, in that time, if Arthur had evolved from his steam-engine brain one scheme for making matters better, he had evolved fifty: one an hour certainly. He was a little anxious about his appearance; the glass told him that he looked younger than a great many school-boys. He found himself, therefore, uncommonly apt to stand on his dignity this evening: but there was no one to show off on except poor Algernon, and *he* was no use. Any one could bully him.

However, he walked across the moonlit quadrangle to his brother's house. It was a pleasant house, opening out of the cloisters, and looking down on the lake. The children were in bed. He found his brother reading in his handsome crimson-furnished study. He was glad to see his dear old friend so well-housed and comfortable after his troubles; and he said—

"How do you think you shall like this new life, Algernon?"

"Not at all," was the reply.

This was scarcely encouraging. His brother did not seem inclined for talking. It occurred to him that he might as well go and see how the matron was getting on; and so he went towards the dormitory, where he expected to find her busy. There was a light in one of the sixth-form studies, and he directed his feet that way. "I wonder where she is, and what she is like," he asked himself. "By the bye, they say that she is something very superior."

Here she was at last, putting one of the sixth-form boys' studies tidy: a most remarkable-looking woman indeed. As *Arthur* saw the face, it was the face of a woman who had been beautiful: a very powerful and resolute face even now. She was quite grey, and wore her hair banded back into a knot behind. Her dress was grey, of a somewhat superior texture, and she wore a long grey shawl, which nearly covered everything, pinned close up to her throat; hair, shawl, and gown all nearly of the same colour. She had no ornaments about her except a white cross, which hung at her side;

and Arthur, seeing a *lady* before him, immediately took off his cap, and made his best bow : all the school-masterism knocked out of him at once. She crossed her arms on her bosom, and bowed reverently : and then they began to talk.

"You seem perfect mistress of your duty, Mrs. Morgan."

"I have been carefully trained to it, and, being naturally clever, I have mastered it."

"You will give great satisfaction here, I see."

"I suppose I shall. I mean to do so."

This was not said with the slightest approach to flippancy, but there was a tamed and deliberated boldness in her way of speaking, to which Arthur applied in his own mind the epithet "splendid."

"I hope we shall work well together, Mrs. Morgan. I am rather apt to be fidgetty and exacting, but I will try not to be so with one so evidently skilled in detail as yourself."

"There is little doubt that we shall work well together, sir. I intend that we should. Your boys are due to-morrow morning. At what time, do you think?"

"All hours, Mrs. Morgan. Up to chapel time at nine in the evening."

"Those who come from close by are the first, of course; and those from long distances the latest?"

"No. I should say rather the reverse. But you cannot tell. I am only judging from Oxford. Can I do anything for you?"

"Nothing; thank you very much. There are one or two matters of detail I wish mended: would it be your place to mention them to the Board, or mine?"

"Yours, certainly."

"I shall have to appear before the Board, then?"

"Of course, if you have any report to make. And now, good-night. May I be allowed to say that I have had a pleasant surprise?"

"And I also," she said, with a very pleasant, honest smile. "May I ask one question more. Do you keep the chapel door open?"

"I will be most careful to do so. It was always my intention to do so. By the bye, have you found your way there yet?"

"I am never long in doing that," she said. "And now, good-night."

She had to light him down some stairs ; and, when he saw her last, standing on the top of a flight of steps, the light was strong on her face and hair. What with her grey hair and grey clothes, she seemed, as she bent her head towards him, to be dressed in a radiance of silver. Waking up once or twice, he thought of her in the chapel, and how very little he should like to stand in some dark corner and see her come sliding silently towards him in the moonlight.

But it was not to the chapel or to prayer that she betook herself that night. She had prayed over this matter long enough, and now began to doubt whether she would wish her prayers answered or not. " I have prayed so earnestly that he should not recognise me. And yet, if he does not——"

Up and down, hour after hour, between the two long lines of white beds, went the grey, ghost-like figure, passing from band to band of bright moonlight which was thrown from the long Gothic windows across the dormitory. Arthur had thought of her as an awful figure to meet sliding along the midnight aisles of the chapel. Had he seen her now, as she paced up and down, with her silver-grey hair flashing in the moon-

light as she passed each window, and her whole figure becoming black as she passed the alternating shadows, he would have thought her more awful still. Up and down nearly all night, with the sleeping world around her. Incapable of prayer now, for she was half wishing that the constant prayer of the last three months might be unanswered. The High Church folks had tamed her wonderfully, and there was no exclamation, no gesticulation. But no system of religion, of which I have heard, has any rule against a woman's walking swiftly up and down all night, with a whole world of loving and longing in her heart, unable for the time to pray, unless it were to pray that her prayers might not be answered.

So for the night. The morrow found her seated in her room, at her duties, directing her maidens, cool, calm, cheerful, business-like; with piles of the boys' linen around her. It was buttons and needles and thread now; and kindly religious talk, and sensible advice to the demurely-clad servants who were assisting her. "A pleasant kind lady," said the maidens to one another. "A wonder to find a real lady taking such a place as this." Yet, though she was majestic, she was

very genial; and not a girl of them all but felt that she was in the presence of a person the like of whom she had never seen before.

She did not talk "goody" to them; nothing of the kind. She inquired about each of them kindly, but not obtrusively, and somehow managed to leave each of them with the impression that religion was the principle to which all others must be deferred, without in the least degree thrusting the idea upon them.

She was absolutely inexorable in details, they noticed. No missing button could escape her eye. Yet she had nothing of the "Tartar" in her, like the old goose, now pensioned, Mother Berry.

"Get the new uniforms out, my dear," she said to the youngest maiden, "and lay them in a row. The boys should begin to arrive soon. At what time do they generally begin to come?" Little thought the demure damsels what a wild expectant woman's heart was raging and beating beneath that solemn grey shawl. They were awed and hushed by her awful calm solemnity: they little thought of the volcano within. If they had they would have only wondered. They were maidens, and knew not of the Storgè.

At last the boys began to arrive, or, to say more truly, creep in. For the first arrivals were two feeble little orphans, presentation boys, aged ten and nine, coming to get their uniforms ; torn by the inexorable necessity of poverty from their mother ; terrified at everything and coming here for shelter. Her two long arms came from beneath her long grey shawl, until they formed horizontally a cross to her body ; and she said, " Come here, my dears, to me." And they looked in her face, and then they crept to her, one under each arm, and were frightened no more.

Then others came, and then more, until her eye got bewildered with their numbers and their varieties ; and her ear got confused with the wonderful differences of their voices ; she all the time, though doing her duty steadily and mechanically, waiting to hear one voice ; which, although it must be changed by now, she thought she would be able to recognise. The other boys came swarming into her, big and little, in all manner of moods, but the voice she longed to hear was dumb to her as yet.

They were in all moods, these boys. Some were low in their minds, almost to being penitential : there were

those who were the most inclined for tears. Others were fractious and petulant; others facetious; others from the very first riotous. They all looked at her curiously, as though to see how much nonsense she would stand; and, finding no clue to the answer in her calm benign face and figure, began an inductive course of experiments, with a view of finding out what her temper really was, and what stand she was likely to take.

Though they tried her hard, she was perfectly calm and good-humoured. The bolder spirits began dancing and fighting before her very soon. Still she took no notice whatever, only now and then quietly smiled.

The riot got most fast and furious. They whirled into her room and out of it again. They fought one another in play, and rolled over and over on the ground. They put on their clean night-gowns over their clothes, and danced in them, sometimes singly, sometimes in a mad aimless carmagnole, sometimes waltzing in pairs, and coming headlong over together. The demurest and oldest of her maidens protested mildly. "Madam," she said, "you will never be able to manage them if you allow them this liberty." She

said, "*I will manage them. I am not here as a disciplinarian. Are boys not to play? Is the sun not to shine? Besides, girl, I am waiting. Leave them alone, girl.*"

Waiting, but not much longer. There was a new noise in the cloister and corridor, and the burden of it was, "*Here's old Sugden.*"

She could not pretend to stitch now. She folded her hands over her work, and said to herself in prayer, "*God, let it be Thy way.*" And then she sat and looked at the crowd of young faces and young figures before her, keeping her eyes towards the door.

A glorious lad, with vitality and vigour in every limb, and with youth, health, goodness, ay, and not a little beauty too, in his face, came hurling in. Their eyes met. She sat perfectly calm, praying silently, with her folded hands clasping one another, painfully. She saw that, when his eyes met hers, the expression of them changed from rollicking vivacity to wonder, to admiration, to respect. But there was no sign of recognition. Her prayers were answered. Her own son did not know her. It was well.

It was very well, save for one ghastly spasm at the

heart, which she did not allow to show in her face. Yes, it was very well.

"Now, Mrs. Morgan," he began, "you must take care to be especially civil to me. I am the oldest boy here, very nearly ; and you will follow me when I say that I am a power in the place. Your policy will be to treat me with peculiar consideration and respect, and never on any account report me. You will be particular about that ; do you see?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Morgan.

"You see I am so clever, my dear Mrs. Morgan, and of such a very strong will, that natures less gifted than mine must naturally yield to me. And *physique* goes a long way, you know. About my personal appearance there can only be but one opinion, I believe. Have the kindness to look on me, Mrs. Morgan, which you don't seem inclined to do, and see whether or no I am a beauty."

"And indeed you are," said the mother's heart within her. The boy had meant nothing whatever by what he had been saying. It was all what he would have called "chaff." But, when she turned her great kind eyes upon his, and laughed low in answer, he got

puzzled, and began to think he had gone too far in some way. How, he could not conceive, for she was not angry.

"You don't mind my nonsense, do you? I forgot you were a lady. I don't mean any harm. The last matron was not a lady, you know."

"I don't mind your nonsense," said she.

"You don't, eh? Very well, then, allow me to give you a little more of it; permit me to tell you that you don't know your duties as a matron in this establishment. Look at the hay these fellows are making about your room, and you sitting there sewing on buttons. Your duty as matron is to get into a blind wax, to bounce out of your chair, to catch the first boy you come across (as it might be me, you know) by the hair of his head, bang his head against that wall, and clear the room. The other matron always did."

"Then you think," she said, "that I could not do it except in that way?"

"Not you; you don't know us."

"Do I not? Watch me."

The tall grey figure rose to its full height, and that attracted some. Her voice made them all quiet at once,

from curiosity, if from nothing else. It was round, full, powerful, and most wonderfully audible. "My dear boys," she said, "look at me, and listen. I have been used to order, and accustomed to have it when I command it. There has been disorder enough, and I must have order now. You hear? Go, and go quickly. Sugden, stay; the rest go."

They went like lambs, and James was left alone with his mother.

"There, you see," she said to him when they were gone; "that seems wonderful to you, does it not? If one could deal with all the ghastly disorder in this world as easily as I have with that little riot, why then, boy, the world would the sooner be ready for the second coming of Christ. For they may set the time of His coming by stars and by numbers, but He will never come again, boy, until we, by tears and by blood, by life-long struggles for the good, through ridicule and poverty and self-denial, have made this world fit for Him. Then He will come and we shall see Him."

This was so utterly unlike anything which James had heard in sermons, that he was a little awed. He had a dim idea that it was strangely expressed; but

also that it meant something. He had to speak, and he said,

"You are not angry with me?"

She, with her whole heart yearning for one kiss, angry with him! If she could only make any pretext for getting near him, touching him, feeling his breath, putting her hand over his hair! How subtle and quick the Storgè makes a mere hen; do you think Mrs. Morgan-Sugden was to be beaten? Not she.

"Your collar is all frayed, Sugden," she said.

"It is an old shirt," said he.

"I shall not have your clean shirt ready before to-morrow," she said; "and you can't go about that figure. Come here, and I will set it right."

"Shall I leave it out?"

"No, come and have it done. I have too much to think about."

So she got him near her, and in doing her work would lay her hand sometimes on his shoulder. Close to her; yet the one sweet kiss, for which her mother's soul thirsted, as far away as ever. The work was done; one more little artifice was left her before he must go. She put her hand over and through his short curls, and

said, "You must have your hair cut, Sugden; I don't allow long hair."

"It was cut a fortnight ago, ma'am," urged James.

"Then it must be cut again to-morrow," she answered. "Look here," she said, drawing one gently out, "this lock is much too long. Now off, boy; I have much to do."

CHAPTER VI.

SILCOTE ESCAPES FROM THE REGION OF BOREDOM.

It got to be terribly dull for the Squire at Silcotes that autumn.

Betts was, of course, installed in his new lodgings at St. Mary's, doing his new duties at the school, fussing, examining into everything, directing, advising those above him in authority, and bullying his inferiors like fifty Bettses. Arthur was there likewise, hard at it. The Princess was *supposed* to be at Silcotes, but was mostly in London or elsewhere, her only public appearances being at the Twyford Station, where she periodically was seen by admiring country neighbours, exquisitely dressed, gorgeously bejewelled, taking her ticket, and dropping her change. The Squire was reduced to his old company. No one was left to him but Anne. It was awfully dull.

Why? He had got on like this for thirty years, and never found it exactly dull. He had made out his time pretty well. He shot a little, and rode a great deal, when he found himself getting dull in old times. He tried these remedies now, but they would not do. He shot better than ever, and never swore at the keeper, but engaged him in conversation. He rode his splendid horses hard and far, and, one day, sneaked so near to the meet, that he got into the ruck of men, and went away like a bird; going hard and well, cutting down most of the field. The hunt did not one half of them know his person, but at the first check it got whispered abroad that the man who rode so well on that great bay was no other than that *bête noire*, Dark Squire Silcote. They killed the fox after a most tremendous run, and the Squire was in with the very few at the death—finish—or what they call it. The master rode up to him, and spoke a few cheery neighbourly words to him (the Squire was a fifty-pound subscriber), and Silcote found himself chatting eagerly and pleasantly to the master about the run, with an almost boyish animation.

But, as he rode home through the darkness, he was the Dark Squire again—darker than ever; and Silcotes was duller than ever that night. All the profusion, all the really well-ordered beauty of the place had got hateful to him.

And why? Firstly, because the memory of a great wrong was beginning to die out of the man's soul—of a wrong so inconceivably and unutterably great, that when I have to tell you of it, as I shall have to do immediately, I see that I must touch with the lightest pencil in my case—because I say the memory of that wrong was getting weakened by kind old Time; who, if he does let die or sweep aside old loves, at all events does the same for old hatreds and wrongs. Secondly, because the man had been aroused from his selfish stupid torpor by new ideas and new interests; and this fact, acting and reacting with the mere effect of time, had made his old, tedious, selfish life disgusting to him.

That a man of such intense moral and physical vitality should have slept so long, may seem surprising to any one who had never seen his face, But Nature told his story plainly enough to those who would read:

The deep-sunk eyes, so close together, told her story about the man, retiring as they did under the heavy eyebrows, 'as though they would shrink into the very soul. The gait of the man, slouching and suspicious, in spite of his great physical strength—the head always thrust forward—told the very same story. The story of a man who had the deepest hatred of publicity,—the deepest jealousy of any fellow-man seeing for one moment into his soul. And yet at the bar, whilst he was there, the man was distinguished for an audacity and a disrespect of persons and formulas which amounted to bad taste.

Was this unnatural? Surely not. His defiant impudence was an effort always, an unnatural effort; and he will confess that, in making that effort, he always said far more than he meant. A man who cannot debate without getting fierce had better leave debate alone. There was no more harm in the Squire than this. He, although with nearly first-rate talents, was suspicious and jealous beyond most Englishmen; and to this man there had happened a hideous and inconceivable wrong. And the man had shut himself up, his wealth allowing him to do so, and growled his soul

out to his sister and his servants and his bloodhounds. That is all.

But this course of procedure would not do any longer at all. The man, such as he was, was roused and wakened. Arthur began it by leading him into this St. Mary's Hospital business, which had involved Betts. And now he found that he could not do without his Betts. Betts's intense realism was at first a rather pleasant foil for his own suspicious sentimentalism; but Betts had now become a necessity, as ice is to an American. Betts and he had fought out, and carried through, what he thought (with intense pleasure, I am bound to say) a most scandalous job. And there was Betts down at the school, getting all the fun, and he, the Squire, left alone with Anne at Silcotes. It was terribly dull.

And Anne. Well, and again Anne. Mrs. Sugden, that remarkable peasant woman, had told him once that he was making a rod for his own back by his spoiling that girl; and the words of that very remarkable woman seemed to be coming true. Anne was what our American brethren call a "limb." He knew that perfectly well, and had seen that every governess

would not stand her ; and so, at great expense, he had got the services of a placid even-tempered lady, possessed of every virtue and every accomplishment. He had told this lady that she would please to consider that her present engagement meant a provision for life. The good lady was very poor,—in fact penniless,—and very humble. But this autumn morning she had come, and, after dissolving herself into tears, had given notice that she would wish to leave that day three months.

Silcote would not accept her warning at all. He told her that his word was passed to provide for her, and put her on her honour to stay. After which he sent for Anne.

“What is this matter between you and Miss Heath-ton, Anne?” was his mild remonstrance, for he was afraid of her.

“What is the meaning of the fireworks on the fifth of November?” was the young lady’s answer. “*I* don’t know. But they always come. *I* don’t know exactly how it began. She went on exasperating me with her old-fashioned drill-sergeant notions until *I* couldn’t stand it, and broke out. And, if my memory

serves me, I was very rude and very vulgar. But I am sick of this place, and all about it. I will go and make it up with her, if you like. What are you going to do to-day? Can't you take me for a ride?"

"I am going to ride across country to St. Mary's," said Silcote.

"Do let me come. I am so utterly weary here. I do hate this place so!"

This was to be his return, then!

"You have everything which the mind of man could possibly desire here."

"I am so bitterly lonely. I have not a soul to speak to," pouted Anne. "I am sick of the horses, and the dogs, and the peacocks and pigs, and the footmen and grooms. I wish I had been a boy, and gone to school. I wish I had been stolen by sweeps, and made to climb up chimneys. I saw a sweep yesterday, and he was laughing at something fit to split his sides. I never have anything to laugh at. Come, do take me. Get my pony ready. I can sleep with Dora."

He gave his consent, and she was soon by his side in a grey riding-habit and low-crowned hat. She was

very beautiful, there was no doubt about that; but on a very small scale. They were splendidly mounted, and rode fast, having far to go. Anne was half wild with joy and high spirits. She would sometimes lay her pretty little gloved hand on the Squire's great arm, and squeeze her thanks into him. She was clever and agreeable, and she made herself very charming to him: it was the most delightful ride either of them had ever had: long remembered.

Late in the afternoon they left the inclosures, and came on the wild silent heath. At sunset they pulled their horses on the edge of a roll in the moor, just above St. Mary's College, and looked over into the deep hollow beneath. The lake was a great crimson pool, with all the fantastic school buildings reflected in it, with the dark woodlands rising sheer behind. Lights were beginning to shine from the windows, sending long trails of reflection into the darkening water; while the hum of three hundred voices arose pleasantly on the night air, and lost itself in the solitude around.

Anne drew a breath of deep delight. "This is something *like* a place," she said.

CHAPTER VII.

—AND, AFTER AN EXCURSION TO DOUBTING CASTLE,—

THEIR men led the horses away to the head-master's stables, and Silcôte, wickedly and for fun, sending Anne perfectly alone, and with no directions, to find Algernon's lodgings, held his way towards Arthur's: looking back from time to time to see how Anne got on among the crowd of boys to whose tender mercies he had so mischievously committed her. She was not in the least embarrassed, but, drawing the skirt of her riding-habit over her left arm, she requested one of the nearest of them to go and find Mr. Sugden, and then stood perfectly still, with her whip-arm drooped at her side, not a little pleased with the astounding effect which her beauty produced. The sensation reached its climax when James appeared, and, coolly accosting her as "Anne," marched off this

splendid creature to the third master's lodgings; and, having seen her in, went across the quadrangle whistling, with his hands in his pockets, perfectly unconcerned.

The Squire, entering by the principal way, found himself in the comfortable bright corridor, swarming with well-fed, well-clad youngsters: his heart warmed at the thought that no inconsiderable part of the good he saw around him was *his* doing. One of the masters whom he did not know, an amiable, grey-headed man, was standing near him, and the Squire, in the warmth of his heart, went up to him and introduced himself.

"Your servant, sir. I am happy to have the honour of your acquaintance. I hope you find everything here quite comfortable, sir. We have hunted high and low for talent, and, by Jove, sir, we intend to induce talent to remain with us. A word to me at any time, sir, on any point, will meet with attention."

"Thank you very much," said the wondering Algeron. "I have the honour to——"

"Not at all," said the Squire, with a polite wave of the hand.

This was very disconcerting, but Algernon came at it again.

"I was about to observe that I had not the happiness. If you will allow me——"

"Certainly, certainly, certainly," said the Squire, with great good humour. "By all means."

Algernon could not help wishing that this burly old gentleman in grey breeches, butcher's boots, and a white hat, would not be quite so polite. He had to bring it out so awkwardly.

"That, in point of fact, I did not know to whom I had the honour of speaking."

"Surely not, surely not! Ha, ha! how could you? And I going on all the time supposing you could know a man you had never seen in your life. Capital! I am Silcote of Silcotes, my dear sir, where I hope to see you some of these days."

Algernon drew suddenly back, and grew pale. He had not, till this last announcement came suddenly upon him, the slightest idea that this burly old country squire in grey was his terrible old father. But he had to speak.

"My name also, sir, is the same as yours. It was

the necessity of my children which drove me to this place, sir; not my own. I had intended to keep out of your way, but fate has ordered it otherwise. I only ask you to believe that our *rencontre* is as purely accidental on my part as it is on yours, and to withdraw."

Silcote was not the less thrown off his balance. He had approved (or consented to) Algernon's appointment, and had got into some corner of his brain the notion that sometimes, at the further end of a corridor, he might see a figure which avoided him. He had never wished to speak to his son or to find him. He had been speaking to him, and had found him—had found in his son a man as grey as himself, but more bent under the pressure of the horrible secret which had ruined both their lives.

The corridor was light, and the noisy stream of boyhood was passing and repassing. The son would have gone quietly away, but the father made a gesture to detain him. Algernon had the children to think of. The two men stood face to face under a lamp, but not looking at one another. Silcote's eyes

were on the ground,—he in deep thought, and Algernon calmly watching him.

An inexorable sort of figure, and a very inexorably shaped head, was all that he saw before the Squire raised his face honestly and calmly to his, and said—

“Let us talk together.”

“Will you follow me?”

“Certainly. I cruelly let the curse descend on you when you were seventeen. I repent. I did wrong. It was a shamefully vindictive action. Since then I have heard nothing but good of you. No one has heard any good of me, God help me! You have borne this bitter curse better than I; and yet, from what I have heard of you from every mouth, you are a man who would feel it more. And you are as grey as I am. Go on, and let us talk together.”

They passed from the noise of the boys and the lights of the corridors, through the dark cloisters, towards Algernon's house. As the dark-gowned figure of Algernon passed on from shadow to shadow before Silcote on their way, ghastly doubts; followed by the faint ghost of a new-born joy, very dim and afar off as yet, passed through his soul. When

they were in Algernon's well-lit study together, the Squire threw himself into a chair, and Algernon began the conversation, standing erect before the fire.

"This interview, sir, is deeply painful to both of us. There is no doubt of that. It was not of my seeking. I anticipate that you will say that I had no business to marry at all. But I married, as I thought, an heiress, and so no blame can be given me for that. Mr. Betts has doubtless explained all that to you. I am a broken and a ruined man, sir; but I ask nothing for myself; only I will kneel and cringe to you for the sake of my unhappy children."

Silcote raised himself from his chair, slowly and solemnly, and confronted him. "Come to the light, sir, and let me see your mother's eyes once more. I know they are there, and I must see them once again before the great coming darkness, even if the sight of them kills me."

Algernon came close to the lamp, and Silcote looked at him steadily and quietly for nearly a minute, and then said "Hah!" like a sigh, and dropped back in his chair. Algernon stood steadily where he was.

After a few moments Silcote spoke again.



"Boy, how old are you?"

"Forty-one."

"And grey. Greyer than I. But it has not killed you yet."

"Not yet, sir."

"Odd. Look at your *physique*, and look at mine. And you knowing it ever since you were seventeen! You ought to be dead, you know."

"I ought never to have been born, sir."

"And you have known it for twenty years and not died under it."

"My religion has supported me, sir."

"We will leave that alone. You, grey-headed boy, look at me again."

Algernon did so.

"I can bear those eyes now; I thought at first they would have maddened me. Boy, is there any wild chance that we have both been abused and deceived?"

"That is entirely your business, sir: the responsibility lies with you. If we are both deceived, *I* have been deceived through you."

"That is true again," said Silcote; "that is true. I

can't stand much talk on this question. Only I ask for one thing. Don't say anything about this interview in a certain quarter."

"In which quarter, sir?"

"Bless you," said the Squire, testily; "is there more than one quarter? The head-master's quarter—Arthur's quarter. Don't tell him of this, man. We have been half maddened, you and I, by this business; but I hope we have both brains enough left to know a bully when we see one: and Arthur is that. But, mind you, I love Arthur better than all the world besides, and have made him my heir. He tells you everything, I believe. How is his health?"

"His health is perfect, sir."

"You know nothing, I see. But the doctors say that those fainting fits are nothing. Do you ever hear from that vagabond villain, Tom?"

"If you mean your son Thomas, now rising in the Austrian army, I hear from him very often, sir."

"You may let me know about him on a future occasion. Now, sir, if you will do me the kindness to send for the boy Sugden, I think our interview may end. Will you shake hands?"

“Certainly, sir.”

“That shake was for the sake of your children ; take this pat on the shoulder for your own good self. You are a good man, sir ; you are a good man. Now quick—the boy Sugden.”

CHAPTER VIII.

—GETS INTO THE REGION OF UNUTTERABLE
ASTONISHMENT—

THE Squire had completely changed his manner by the time that the boy Sugden appeared. The reaction from his terrible talk with Algernon had made him sarcastic and peculiar. Our old friend James appeared before him, looking horribly guilty, but very charming and handsome; and the Squire, sitting up in his chair, began on him snarling.

“You are a most charming boy; you are a nice piece of goods: you will do, you will. Mr. Silcote, keep your eye on this boy: he’ll do. What do you think of yourself, sir? Hey?”

James might have said that he thought a great deal of himself, but he didn’t. He only stood before the chairman, Squire Silcote, shifting from one leg to the

other, looking, as the Squire afterwards told Betts, so confoundedly handsome and amiable that it was a wonder he did not throw the poker at him.

"Silence, hey! Is this obstinacy or stupidity? Is this letter yours, sir?"

"It is certainly mine, sir," said James, quietly.

"A cool proposition, that I should send you to Italy at my own expense; and, if possible, my nephew Reginald also! On what grounds, may I most humbly ask, do you base this most astounding demand?"

"It is no demand, sir," said James, looking frankly and slily at him, for he had got to understand him; "it is only a proposition. It is generally considered to be not only a duty, but a privilege, of the rich to patronize and assist genius."

"Certainly, said Silcote. "I allow all that. Would you be so condescending as to show me your genius? You don't happen to have it about you, do you? If you will meet me so far as to take your genius out of your pocket and hand it to me for inspection, I'll begin to think about patronizing it. No more of it, sir. I'll think over it when I've seen your drawings. Come with me, sir. Good night, Mr. Silcote."

So the Squire and James went away together. "Boy," he said, as he crossed the quadrangle, "I will think of this Italian scheme of yours more fully; I don't think I shall let you go. I will examine your drawings as an amateur, and get them examined by more competent men. Unless their dictum is 'First-rate' I shall not consent. An artist of necessity dissociates himself from all ties of—of any kind whatever—and I don't see my way to it. Now I want to see this new matron, lady superintendent, or whatever she calls herself. Take me to her. What do the boys say about her?"

"She is strict, but very kind; we are all very fond of her. I have had a sitting from her."

"Indeed, my young Weigall. Did you find her a study worthy of your genius?"

"She has a magnificent head, and her get-up is simply superb. She is worthy of a better pencil than ever mine will be."

"How sweetly modest! This must be the self-depreciation of a true genius. Is this her room? Pray announce me."

James, knocking at the door, was told to enter in a

kindly quiet voice which attracted the Squire's attention. They passed in together. Silcote saw before him a grey-headed woman, dressed in grey, with a long grey shawl, with her head turned away from him, bending over baskets of linen which she was sorting. She attracted his attention at once, and he began, "I beg your pardon, madam,—” when she turned and looked at him.

Silcote was transfixed with unutterable astonishment. He burst out, "Why, what the——!" when she suddenly raised her right hand, and with her left pointed to the boy beside him. Silcote understood in a moment, as he put it to himself mentally, "The cub has not recognised her then." He changed his manner at once. "Madam," he said, "I have come, as chairman, to have a talk with you on various matters. Are you at leisure?"

"I am at leisure, sir; at least, if you will allow me to go on with my work. When the hands are idle the memory gets busy. You have found that yourself, sir, I do not doubt."

The Squire swung himself round towards James, and, standing squarer and broader than ever before him, pointed his finger at him, and said—

"Go, and shut the door after you."

Which things James did.

"Now, my dear Mrs. Sugden," said he, pulling up a chair, and sitting down in front of her, "would you be kind enough to let me know the meaning of this?"

"Certainly. First of all, how did you call me just now?"

"I called you Mrs. Sugden."

"That is not my name. It *was*, and is still, that of my half-brother, who passed for my husband when I lived in your little cottage at Beechwood! but it is not mine."

"Your half-brother?" said Silcote. "Was not Sugden your husband, then?"

"No, only half-brother. His mother was not the same as mine. Our common father, a twenty-acre freeholder in Devonshire, married twice. The name of his first wife, of my brother's mother, was Coplestone; the name of his second wife, *my* mother, was Lee."

"Then how shall I call you? Mrs. Morgan?"

"Not at all. A mere *nom de guerre*, which I

assumed when they objected to the title I bore at St. Peter's, 'Sister Mary.' Nothing more than that."

"Then perhaps, madam, to facilitate conversation, you would put me in possession of your style and titles."

"I am Mrs. Thomas Silcote, your unworthy, but dutiful daughter-in-law," she said very quietly.

The Squire fell back in his chair. "Don't regard me, my dear madam; I have the constitution of a horse. If I had not, I should have been in Bedlam, or the grave years ago. Let us have it out, madam. I thought there were Silcotes enough encumbering the face of the earth. There don't happen to be any more of you, I suppose?"

"There is James, you know," said Mrs. Thomas Silcote, smiling. "He makes another. I don't think there are any more."

"Quite so," said Silcote. "James. I begin to collect myself. James, then, is my lawful grandson?"

"Most certainly. Do you desire proofs?"

"Not if you assert it. You yourself are a standing proof of every proposition that comes out of your mouth."

"I was a labourer's daughter," said Mrs. Thomas. "A twenty-acre free-holder is a labourer, is he not?"

"I don't believe a word of it," said Silcote.

"I thought you were bound to believe everything I said a minute ago?"

"Don't fence with me. It is not fair. You utterly ruin my nerves, and then begin what these low boys here call 'chaffing.' Will you explain to me how all this came about?"

"Not to-night."

"You really must in part. How on earth did you come here?"

"Merely by answering an advertisement."

"Does Betts know nothing?"

"Not a word. It is all between you and me. And it must remain there."

"How was it that the boy did not recognise you?"

"Time, time, time!"

Silcote sat perfectly silent. "Time works wonders," he said, at last. "You wanted to see him, I suppose, and you risked his recognising you?"

"See him!" said Mrs. Silcote. "I wanted to touch

him, I wanted to kiss him ; but I cannot do that. Do you remember, one day in your garden, pointing out to me that it would be a drawback to the boy if his low parentage was known ?”

“ I do. God forgive me if I did wrong.”

“ You did right : even speaking from what you knew then. I know you, Silcote, as a good and kind man, though you have tried hard to sell yourself to the evil one. And so I tell you this : that I have doubts in my utter ignorance, whether the world would take my marriage to be a legal one ; and, therefore, I have remained unknown to the boy.”

“ Where, and how, were you married ?”

“ In Scotland.” And she told him the particulars.

“ Bless the woman !” he exclaimed. “ You are as much my daughter-in-law as if you had been married in St. George’s Hanover Square, with eighteen bridesmaids. I wish I had known this. Once more, will you tell me the whole story ?”

“ Not to-night.”

“ There is no reason against your letting the boy know who your are.”

“ Let it be—let it be. The father is outlawed, and

the mother's claim cannot be quite proved. It would be a disadvantage to the boy. And hear me, you Dark Squire, with your bloodhounds. The boy has got to love me again, with a new fresh love overlying the mere old love which lives in his memory. He has been painting my face, and the new love showed itself in his eyes a hundred times."

"Was there no recognition?"

"A dim stirring of memory only, which made him more strangely beautiful than ever. Once or twice there was such a fixed stare in his glorious eyes that I thought I was betrayed. But I was not. It was only the old love of memory wedding itself to the new love of respect and admiration. Would you be loved better than that?"

"Confound the woman!" said the Squire to himself, and then sat quite silent—she going on mending shirts.

At last he said, "The boy wants to go to Italy and study art. I have had bother enough with Italy, but I won't stand in his way. I recognise him as my grandson, and I like the boy. But is there any promise in these drawings of his? We must not make a fool of the lad. I have seen nothing of his as yet."

Mrs. Silcote rose, and brought from a bureau a small canvass with a head, painted in oils, upon it. It was the likeness of herself which James had done. She said,

“Will that do?”

“Do!” said Silcote, “I should think it would. There is genius in every line of it.”

“So I thought, thinking at the same time that I might be blinded by my love. Let him go, Silcote. Did you ever know what it was to love, Silcote?—not to love with the old love and the new love with which my boy and I love one another; but to love blindly and foolishly, from an instinct more powerful than reason? I loved so once, and believed myself loved still more deeply in return; and one fine day, I found that I had never been loved at all, and had only been tricked and deceived by words sweet as angels, falsier than devils. I found that out one day, Silcote, and my heart withered utterly up within me. And I was desperate and mad, and only saved from the river by a gentle brother, who believed me lost—in one sense of the word. And he and I went back to the fields and the fallows, and fought nature for bread together, as we

had been used to do when we were children together, and when mine was only a child's beauty."

A very long silence, during which she sat as calm as Memnon.

When she found her voice again, she went on—

"Do you begin to understand me? Are you capable of understanding the case of one who would have given up everything in this world, ay, and God forgive me if I blaspheme—would have given up all hopes in the next, for the love of one being, and then found that that love never existed at all?—that she had been a dupe and a fool from the first, and that, even while his hand was in her hair, he was laughing at her? *I* went through this, and did not die. Could you dare to warrant the same for yourself?"

A very long pause here. Buttons stitched on shirts, and shirts dextrously folded and placed away, Silcote sitting with his hands before his eyes the whole time. At last he spoke.

"You speak of my son Thomas, whom I loved once. Do you love him still?"

"I cannot say," she answered. "Do you?"

"And I cannot say either," replied Silcote.

"He is your son," she urged.

"And he is the father of yours," he replied.

"You have the quickness of your family in answer," she said. "Leave this question."

"You have told me part of your story, and I will not ask for details to-night. You ask me if I know what it is to awake from a dream of love, and find that that love never existed. I do! May I tell you my story? I have gone through all that you speak of, and am still alive. Men with my frame and my brain don't die, or go mad. But I warn you solemnly that, if you allow me to tell you my story, you must prepare your nerves. It is so ghastly, so inconceivable, so unutterably horrible, that I can only hope that the telling of it to you will not kill me."

"You have been abused, Squire. And, may I ask, have you never told it before? The High Church people, among whom I have been lately, and who have done me good—although I don't go with them, I will allow that—urge confession. It is capable of any amount of abuse, this confession: but, looking at it in the light of merely a confidential communication of a puzzling evil, it generally does good. You

have, with your jealous reticence, kept some great evil to yourself for many years, I fear. Why have you never told it before?"

"Why?—Temper, I suppose. I seem like the Ancient Mariner. I can't tell my story to any one whose face does not invite me; and your face was the first one which ever did invite me."

"Then Silcote, let me hear this story of yours."

And so Silcote told his story.

CHAPTER IX.

—AND THEN, HAVING MADE CONFESSION, BUT
GETTING NO ABSOLUTION—

“I WAS, my dear Mrs. Sugden, an ambitious, handsome young fellow,—very popular; with an intention of enjoying life, and in every way fitted for enjoying it. I was sole heir to a very large fortune; and, beside that, came from a family of attorneys: another fortune. No part of my scheme was idleness or luxury. I believed myself to have (nay, I had) considerable talent, not a mean share of wit, and a ready tongue; and I determined—don’t laugh at a shipwrecked man—to follow my career as a barrister until I sat upon the bench. My family connexions started me very quickly in a fine practice; but bless you, I could have made my fortune without *them*. Ask any of

my contemporaries. I am only telling you the plain truth, I assure you. Who am *I* that I should boast?

"I suppose that at twenty-five I was one of the most fortunate men that ever lived. With my talents and knowledge of law, I would have booked myself for six or seven thousand a year by my practice at forty. I loved my profession intensely; I was a lawyer in my very blood, and all that fate asked of me was to go on and make a noble fortune by the pursuit I loved best in the whole world. And I must marry, too: and a young lady, beautiful, well-born, rich, and highly educated, was ready to marry me. And she had ninety thousand pounds of her own.

"Did I love her or her money? No, I loved her, my dear madam, ever since she was a child. And she loved me at one time. Look at me."

Mrs. Thomas Silcote looked at him very steadily indeed.

"Do I look mad?"

"No," she said very quietly; "you look perfectly sane."

"Hah!" said Silcote. "And yet I sit here and

tell you as a solemn truth, that I *know* that at one time she did love me."

"I have no doubt she did. You had better go on," said Mrs. Thomas Silcote.

"I loved her when she was a child; more deeply yet when I was courting her; still more deeply as a bride; until my whole soul merged into hers as a wife. There never was a woman loved as that woman was by me."

"Well?"

"My sister Mary, whom you know as the Princess, had been a great deal in Italy, principally at Venice, and a great deal also in Vienna; for, next to Italian life, she loved the free and easy life of South Germany. My wife had a son, Algernon, now a master in this very college, and was a long time in recovering her health afterwards. The doctors strongly recommended change of air and scene.

"At this conjunction of circumstances, my sister came back to England from Italy or Austria (she was always travelling between the two), and, finding my wife in ill health, proposed to take her to Florence to spend the winter. I was loth to part with my

darling, still more loth to let her go with my foolish sister. But the doctors were all for it, and old Miss Raylock (you know her) was going also, and so I consented. It was term time, and I could not follow them for six weeks. I let her go, against my better judgment.

“For I knew my sister well. She is one of the most foolish and silly women that ever walked the earth. And she is very untruthful withal: but probably her most remarkable quality is her perfectly donkeyish obstinacy. Like most weak and foolish women, she has a love of mystery and of mysterious power, and she had got herself, before this, mixed up in an infinity of Austro-Italian plots, having no idea of their merits, but getting herself made a fool of alternately by both parties. I had argued with her on this matter often, but you might as well have argued with the pump. She believed herself trusted by both parties, whereas the fact was that she was merely used as a disseminator of false intelligence.

“When term was over, I followed them to Italy. The state of things which I found there was deeply displeasing to me. I found a coterie of English living

in a free and easy manner in one another's houses; the leading members of which were my sister, Miss Raylock, a certain Sir Godfrey Mallory, and my wife. My wife and Miss Raylock seemed to be the only people who were living in the least degree up to the English standard of propriety, as it went in those days. As for my sister, she had succeeded in surrounding the whole party with all the political scum of Europe, as it seemed to me. I never saw such a parcel of cut-throat villains, before or since, as were gathered every evening in my sister's house: nay, not only in my sister's house, but in my wife's—that is, my own. I wondered how they dared assemble there, and expected a descent of police immediately. There were two people about my sister, however, to whom I took a stronger objection than to any other two. The one was a man at that time acting as her major-domo, a German, called Kriegsthurm; the other was my late brother-in-law, the Prince of Castelnuovo.

“How they were allowed to talk the rank sedition they did was a puzzle to me. I am, like most Englishmen, perfectly liberal, rather seditious, about foreign politics, but they seemed to me to be going rather

too far. I found the truth out though, one night when I had retired from their intolerable jargon, and was smoking my cigar at a *café*. A very gentlemanly and quiet young man drew his chair near mine, and entered into conversation. I took a great fancy to the man, and we exchanged names when we parted. What the deuce was it? A Roman name, I remember. Colonna?—Orsini?—No—but a Roman name.”

“Not Frangipanni?”

“The same. How strange!”

“He is our new Italian teacher: he comes down twice a week by rail if he can get a class. One of Betts’s men, that is all. The ghosts are rising, Silcote.”

“So it seems. Well, this man and I entered into close conversation, and he told me the history of the state of society up at my sister’s villa. It was a house watched by the police for political purposes,—the Dionysius’s Ear of the police. The people who assembled there were either spies or fools, with two exceptions.

“I asked him for those two exceptions, and the man was frank and gentleman-like with me. The exceptions he named were, strange to say, the very two men to whom I had taken such a great dislike—the Prince

of Castelnovo, and that very queer German Kriegsthurm.

"He went on in French, 'I put my liberty in your hands, Monsieur. Why? I cannot say. But I am a patriot, and those two men are faithful patriots. For me I never go to Miladi Silcote's house. I am on my good behaviour. I do not wish to be suspect. I receive the prince, and also Kriegsthurm, at my own, where my beautiful little wife, also a patriot, entertains. But go to Miladi Silcote's, no. To Miss Raylock's but little now. Their patriotism is advanced, but they are indiscreet. Sir Godfrey Mallory also is indiscreet in my opinion. My wife does not receive Sir Godfrey. I do not allow my wife to receive him!'

"Daughter-in-law, that was the first bite of the serpent. I knew that my wife had had one proposal before mine, and that the proposer had been Sir Godfrey Mallory. I knew that."

"And also that she had refused him," said Mrs. Thomas Silcote, cheerily.

"Certainly. But here he was again, and they were living so very fast and loose. All Leicester Square round them—and—and—I can't go on."

"You must go on to the end," said Mrs. Thomas Silcote. "Now?"

"I sulked with her," went on Silcote in a low voice. "Not in words about that man; though I was jealous, I did not dare to do that. Besides, I could not. I suppose I must tell. I took her home, but my sister and her precious major-domo, Kriegsthurm, came too. And Sir Godfrey Mallory followed us. And I sulked with her all the time: though I loved her—oh woman! woman! you can't dream of my intense devoted love for that wife of mine!"

There was a long pause. He could not go on, and she would not speak.

"We were never the same to one another after this. I loved her as deeply as ever, but the devil had come between us, and would not go. I thought she had been indiscreet, and could not forget it. I sulked with her, and was persistently hard with her. If I begin thinking of the beautiful quiet little ways and actions by which she tried to win me back, I shall go out of my mind at last, after all these years. When you have heard all, you will think me a madman for solemnly declaring this: that even now, after all is over, I would give all

my expectations on this side of the grave—ay, and on the other also—to have her back even as she was at the very last. I may have been unkind to her, God forgive me; but no man ever so wholly gave up his soul to a woman, as I did to her, until that fatal night at Exeter.”

“Your mind is diseased, Silcote,” said Mrs. Thomas. “You have been abused. My instinct tells me so.”

“I guessed at the same thing to-night, when I saw her son; but listen. My theory always has been till lately, that I tired out her patience—that I turned her into a fiend by my own temper. But I had proofs. I struck Sir Godfrey Mallory (for he and my sister had followed me there to Exeter again, two years or more after my suspicions had begun), and then sat down to my briefs. The last proof came next morning, but I went into court as gay as ever to defend a sailor boy for murder. And, when the excitement of it was over, I turned into the man I am now and ever shall be. Can you conceive this? A love so deep, so wild, so strong, so jealous as mine, for one who is still, after all—ay, hear me there—dearer to me than all life? Can you conceive this, and hear what follows?”

“What proofs had you? Proofs against your wife? Against Sir Godfrey Mallory?”

His face was livid as he spoke, but he found words to utter the terrible secret.

“Worse than that. I had a letter telling me where to look for poison; and I looked and found it. But I never told her what I knew. I took her back to Italy, and she died there in a year. She never knew it. I was as mute as a stone to her. I was never unkind to her; but I never spoke to her; and she tried every beautiful little winning way of hers,—each one of which now, when memory is aroused, scorches my heart like fire,—to win me back. And I was cold stone to her. And she died, and her last look at me was one of love and forgiveness, and puzzled wonder at our estrangement. And memory of it all was dying out under the influence of time, and I thought I was forgetting all about it, until to-night I saw her son, and knew that I loved her better than ever. So now, instead of oblivion, there comes a newborn remorse. Do you want more?”

“Yes,” said Mrs. Thomas Silcote, boldly. “Where is this letter which condemned her. Have you got it?”

"Do not go too far with me. I keep it in a box in my bedroom, and every night a devil comes and dances on that box, and I watch him. Leave me alone, woman; I may get dangerous."

"Not you. Is this all you have to tell me?"

"Enough, surely, I should think."

The tall grey figure rose on him in contempt and anger. "Then this, sir, is the miserable and ridiculous lie, with which you have been maddening yourself for thirty years! Have you believed this for all that time, and not died? Shame on you! shame, Silcote! Is it on such grounds as these that you have killed a most unhappy and ill-used lady, by your wicked jealousy and suspicion? Listen to me, sir. You are getting old, and your life may be too short for the work; but don't dare to die, don't dare to face the judgment, until every word of this wicked lie is refuted; and this poor lady's memory is avenged. Don't argue with me. It is a falsehood, sir, from beginning to end. Do you not see it now?"

"If it is," said Silcote, "and I begin to believe so, what room is there for me on the earth or in heaven, or elsewhere?"

“Right it, and ask the question afterwards. Go.”

Silcote never went near Arthur's house that night. A solitary poacher, in Bramshill Park, lurking in one of the northern glens a little after midnight, heard a sound different from the fitful sighing of the night-wind in the fir-trees, and, before he had time to make out that it was a horse's feet brushing swiftly through the heather, saw a horseman pass him at full speed, and hold away north-east, and believed ever afterwards that he had seen a ghost. The grooms at Silcotes were knocked up at half-past one, amidst the baying of the bloodhounds, and found their master in the yard, looking stranger and “darker” than ever. But he apologised very gently to them for the trouble he had given them so late at night, and said that his return had been quite unforeseen. James's friend, the young servant, coming sleepily down to answer the kicking at one of the back doors, made by the groom, and believing his master to be miles away, was sulkily facetious when he opened it, and then was stricken to stone at finding himself face to face with the Squire. But the Squire was very gentle, and the young man, sitting up wearily, lest his inexorable master might

want something before he went to bed, had to stop up until morning.

For the Squire, with eyebrows knitted deeper than ever, and with his hand close clasped before him, walked up and down the old hall till broad day.

CHAPTER X.

GOES HOME, AND LEAVES ARTHUR TO ENJOY HIS
SHARE OF ASTONISHMENT.

THE boys had been a little time back, and Arthur had sorted them into new classes, and had been tremendously busy. The general opinion of the boys was, that they didn't like him: which was extremely natural. It was part of his plan (for he had achieved the art of school-mastering from second-hand, and had even bought Arnold's 'Life and Letters') to watch and study the character of each boy most carefully; and see which was to be treated with geniality, and which with severity, and so forth. Poor don! As clever as he could be, wanting only one thing, genius; and believing that he could be genial, and could attract a boy's confidence by line and rule. The boys did not

like him even in these early busy times, and got cordially to hate him afterwards, in spite of his inexorable justice, generally a quality which boys appreciate greatly. Arthur's geniality was Birmingham, and the boys knew it. Algernon was often unjust, and sometimes mislaid his temper now ; Betts was at furious war with them all on every conceivable subject ; but they loved Betts and Algernon, and they never could endure Arthur. But I must go back to the third day after the first meeting.

He was tired with his work, and he felt need for some relaxation. Music was his favourite relaxation, and he determined to have some music. The anthem on the very first Sunday was not to his taste, and he thought that he could find some one who could please him better than the organist. He put on his cap, and went across to his brother's lodgings.

On opening his brother's study door, which opened out of the cloisters, he only found Miss Dora, as sedate as you please, quite alone, sewing before the fire.

"Good evening, uncle," she said. A sentence which is hardly worth the paper it is written on. A sen-

tence so unmeaning that an editor might justly object to its being "set up;" but worth writing down, if one could only give the emphasis. At all events, there was an emphasis about it somewhere; I should say not far from the first *e* in evening, which made Arthur say to himself, that she was a very saucy and forward girl.

But he could override and put down, by sheer disregard, all forms of sauciness. He merely asked her contemptuously—

"Fetch Miss Lee to me, will you? Tell her I want her."

"I doubt if she would come to you, *now*," said Dora, coolly. "Besides, it is too late to start for London."

"Is she not here? Is she in London?"

"I can't say," said Dora, going on with her work. "She dates her letters to me from her house in Curzon Street, Mayfair: rather too near the Farm Street Mews Chapel to suit my Protestantism. I wish she lived further away from it. Did you ever go there, uncle?"

"Farm Street Mews Chapel? No."

"You should. Splendid mass, uncle. One of the

best masses you can hear in London. Miss Lee took me there in the summer, while I was staying with her; it was really as fine as that sort of thing can be. Thanks to your instructions in music, Miss Lee was thoroughly able to appreciate it. I am afraid she will go to Rome, though; in fact, I thought she had gone, but found she had been stopped at rather more than three-quarters of the way by some extremely High Church people. Still I wish she did not live quite so handy to Farm Street. I was in hopes you were going to marry her," continued this *demoiselle terrible*; "you might have kept her on our side of the border."

"Don't talk nonsense, Dora. I will not permit it."

Miss Herbert might possibly, after some of her conscientious study, say "Certainly not," as demurely as Dora said it. For, poor me, I have only to write it down.

"Has Miss Lee left you, and got a situation in Curzon Street, Mayfair?" asked Arthur.

"She has left us, certainly. But I am inclined to doubt whether, now she has come into her property, she would take another situation as governess."

"Then it is enough to keep her? I heard she had come in for a small legacy, but I have neither time nor inclination for details."

"It is certainly enough to keep her," said Dora, quietly and sarcastically; "that is to say, if she makes it go as far as it ought. And it *may* be doubled."

"Tell me all about it, Dora. I am getting interested."

"I thought you were interested in her before. It is a great pity that she has got into the hands of these ultra-High Church people. It was my father's fault partly, I will allow. But you had great influence over her once, uncle; why did you not keep it up? I fear greatly that all her fortune present and prospective will get ultimately into the hands of the papists."

"Her fortune? Has she got a fortune? I have heard nothing. I thought she was with you."

"I don't know what you call a fortune," said Dora, maliciously. "I will tell you all I know. There are a vast number of Lees in Devonshire, and the king of all the Lees, Mr. Lee of Basset, has died without a male heir, and has bequeathed his great property

to the two female heirs in his line; one of whom is Miss Lee."

"Good heavens!" said Arthur.

"The other happens strangely to be a woman I remember perfectly well,—James's mother."

"Who is 'James,' in the name of goodness?" said Arthur.

"Never mind now. I thought you knew him. Your memory is short, uncle."

"Never mind my memory. Go on."

"Certainly. They have found Miss Lee, and she has got her money; but they can't find James's mother. As far as we can make out, if they don't find Mrs. Sugden the whole of it will go to Miss Lee. I know nothing about the terms of the will; but, as far as I can gather, if Mrs. Sugden does not turn up, Miss Lee, instead of having four thousand a year, will have eight. It is a good deal of money, is it not, uncle?"

"Four thousand a year! The girl is mad."

"Miss Lee, you mean. I think she is quite mad myself; as mad as a hatter or a March hare, to get in with those extreme High Church people. Mind,

I know nothing about the law of the case, uncle; only Miss Lee has got *her* four thousand a year, and seems to me in the very jaws of popery."

Next morning Arthur, with a dour face, set to at a work which he had laid out for himself—that of examining the lower classes in order. An unhappy but ingenious and poetical boy freely construed "*Tra-huntque siccas machinæ carinas*" by "The bathing machines drag down the sick people to the careening harbour."

Arthur lost his temper, and banged the boy over the head with a Valpy's Horace. Miss Lee, with four thousand a year, and on the verge of Rome! Bless the boy, it's a wonder he hadn't killed him.

CHAPTER XI.

THE PRINCESS DEPARTS SOUTHWARD.

SILCOTE, in the astonishment produced by meeting with Algernon so suddenly, and by finding his own daughter-in-law in that remarkable woman who had been living so long close to his park-gates, rode back to Silcotes from St. Mary's in a state of extreme confusion. His confusion lasted through the night, which he spent in walking up and down the hall; and as night grew into morning the confusion remained, and had superadded to it an ever-growing terror.

He had told Mrs. Thomas Silcote the truth. "The memory of it was dying out until to-night I saw *her* son, and knew that I loved her better than ever; so now, instead of oblivion, there comes a new-born remorse."

This was all true. It was easily hinted at to Algernon in the sudden shock of their accidental and awkward meeting; it was easily spoken of in his tragical passionate talk with his newly-found daughter-in-law. The talk about it was easy; but the plain, hard result, now that he was alone in the solitary house, was terrible, and the terror grew as he paced up and down.

If he *had* been abused; if his evil suspicious temper *had*, after all, killed the gentlest, kindest woman who ever lived; if all those sweet little arts of hers which she had used upon him, to bring him back to her, had not been the wiles of a would-be murderess, but the gentle trusting arts of a tender wife, only wondering at the cause of his estrangement;—what room was there left for him on earth, or elsewhere? Once or twice on the previous day he had felt a kind of new joy at the hope that his first wife's innocence might be proved: now, when his daughter-in-law had said out roundly, and even furiously, that she believed him mistaken, he began to see the frightful consequences to himself if his dead wife's character were ever cleared up. There was no place for him anywhere. Those

gentle, wondering, inquiring eyes of his murdered wife would haunt him to the grave, and beyond it.

His second wife, the mother of Thomas, Arthur, and Evelyn, had been always a mere cipher to him. They had never cared much for one another. Silcote was not a man who could love twice, and she was a woman whom he had married in spite. She had borne him children, and, having done that, had died: and the bill for her monument was 187*l.* 10*s.* 8*d.*—probably the most noticeable fact in her history. A foolish woman, not even gifted with a temper; whom even her own children vilipended. She thought once, and thought always, that she had done a fine thing in marrying Silcote; and indeed he was very kind to her. *Requiescat.* Her existence had been calmly lymphatic and her memory always dim; the sort of woman who required a very expressive tombstone to keep her within human memory at all. Now, to the villagers she existed no longer, except through her tombstone. She was to them represented by nearly two hundred pounds worth of granite. They had seldom seen her. She had been nothing to them, but they were proud of her, because her tomb was one of the few sights of the

place. She had been little more to Silcote himself at any time, and now such memory as he had of her was lost and obscured in the memory of his first wife.

"Have you got that letter?" the woman had asked. And he had answered that it was in a box in his bedroom, and that a devil came and danced on it every night. He had not looked into that box for years, and it was upstairs in his bedroom even now. There were many letters in that box, *the* letter among others. At one time he nearly gained courage to go to his room and burn the box, but his courage failed. The little devil which always danced on that box in the dark waking hours of the night would, be dancing now, fiercely and triumphantly.

He wanted to believe her innocence, and he wanted to believe her guilt. If she was guilty, all the beautiful old recollections of the wife as she was, at least at one time, were the delusions of an exceptionally wicked devil. If she was innocent, he was himself one for whom there was no ascertained place. Action and reaction, tearing the miserable man's soul to pieces, went on through the night: at one time he determined to move heaven and earth to prove her guilty, at

another time an old-forgotten spring of tenderness would gush up and mount to his heart, but never to his eyes. Hysterical tears, which sometimes give relief, were impossible to a man of his iron constitution; prayer, from long desuetude, had become impossible also.

Those who could have helped him were far away. His beloved Arthur, prig and *doctrinaire*, as he called him, was a sensible man and a Christian, and could have done something for him. Algy, whom he considered as half a Romanist, could have helped him too. Betts—why Betts would have been much better than nobody; Betts, with his realism, would have torn this ghastly web of soul-excruciating self-examination to pieces in a moment, and they could have had up a magnum of the Château Margaux, and finished with *solvuntur risu tabulæ*. Even that strange grey woman, his daughter-in-law, who had said such bitter fierce words to him that night,—*she* would have been better than utter isolation. Her sharp caustic bitter words had not stung deeply at first, but the burn was beginning to tingle now; and in his present mood he hated her, because he feared she was right. Yet he would

sooner have fought her point by point than be left to madden his soul alone in the dark hall, amidst all his accumulated luxury.

Then the horrid wheel of thought went round again. *Where* was she, innocent or guilty? *Could* the soul be mortal? If immortal, was there any possibility of a meeting? and so on. At one time dreading to meet her again; at another wishing to do so to learn the truth, at another longing, with his whole soul, to see her once again beyond the grave, that, even if the worst were true, they might explain all things to one another, and after that go hand in hand through the great eternity together.

They might well, these agricultural boors, call him Dark Squire Silcote. Their simple superstitious tact seldom gives a bad nickname to any man. They were right enough here. Silcote was in utterly Egyptian darkness this night. Nothing left him just now, to connect him with other men, but a blind old tenderness for a woman. And he had believed for many years that that woman had wished to murder him. Evil and good were fighting for him; and, when evil for a time got the upper hand, Silcote's mood was darker than

ever, and the memory of his wife was put aside to spare himself the remorse which would be his fate ~~were~~ the terrible story of her guilt proved to be a lie.

He was in the blackest mood of all at day-dawn, when the mere physical habit of years made him leave the hall and go towards his bath-room. He had believed himself to be alone in the house with the servants; till, coming into a long gallery, he saw approaching him his sister the Princess, beautifully dressed in silk, seal-skin, and sable, worth to the buyers of old clothes a thousand pounds as she stood.

Her first look was of surprise, her second one of unutterable terror. For before her, in the dim light of the morning, stood her brother, firmly planted in her path. She looked on that square stern figure, that grey head, and those black eyebrows, for one instant, and then she began to whimper, and dropped her muff.

"Pick that thing up—it cost a hundred guineas, I know—and come here."

She made a feeble effort to reach towards her muff, but it was a failure. Her beautiful little hands, the quivering of which could be seen under the perfectly-fitting French gloves, were first spread abroad in an

attitude of terror, and then brought together in an attitude of prayer. She went down on her knees, and said, "Brother! brother! don't murder me. I will swear I never knew it till lately, and that I am innocent."

"Get up, and don't be a fool. What do you know about this business? And where are you going?"

"I know nothing about any business at all. But if you look *farouche* at me like that, you will kill me. He has been extorting money from me again. Mercy, brother, mercy!"

The Squire's purpose was utterly changed, and an explanation indefinitely postponed. Kriegsturm was bullying the Princess for money, and the Squire thought it must be his son Thomas. His better nature prevailed. He said—

"He has no right to serve you like this. Is he in debt again?"

"He is making a fortune; and making it out of me. Brother, I will explain everything."

"No need, my poor sister. How much does he want?"

"Two hundred pounds. And I have so many calls upon me. Brother, I will tell you everything——"

"Let be. I have had enough for one night. I will give you a cheque if you will come to my study. Tell the rascal to mind what he is about. I can forgive seventy times seven, but not seven hundred thousand times seven. I shall not go to bed. Tell the servants to bring the letters to me here in my study. Now kiss me, sister, and go your ways."

"Good-bye, brother."

"And good-bye, also, sister. When will you be back?"

"I am not certain."

"Shall I wait dinner?"

"No; I think not."

"Don't be such a fool, sister."

"In what way?"

"Generally."

"I am as God made me," said the poor Princess, and went her ways. It was a long time before she darkened the doors of Silcote again, and when she did, the darkness of the shadow on her mind was darker than the shadow which she threw across the threshold.

CHAPTER XII.

THE SQUIRE SEES THAT HE HAS ONCE MORE OVERREACHED HIMSELF.

THERE were no letters of consequence by the morning post, and Silcote went about his farm that day. He missed Anne very much, and wished for company of any sort. The horrible night he had passed was still horrible in recollection, even in broad daylight. He had always had a sneaking fear of his reason giving way under solitude and isolation, and he was full of that terror now. He was getting hardly plagued for his sins, and was in terror lest he should lose his reason in the plaguing. Of God's mercy he had no idea; in God's vengeance he believed, like a devil, and trembled.

He was alone in his great house; utterly alone. His bloodhounds, the most evil of all his evil fancies, were

baying in their yard. His maids and footmen were swarming about the house, from butler to steward's room boy; from housekeeper to still-room maid, putting all things in their old English order—for nothing. His grooms were merry over their beautiful horses, exchanging jokes and hopes in which he had no part. His bailiffs and his labourers were abroad over his farm, taking far more interest in the sowing of the seed, and the breaking of the clay, from which they could get no profit, than did the Squire himself. And he—the lord and master of it all, the mainspring of the whole great useless machine—stood utterly alone, without one soul to speak to on equal terms; and with a bitter terror gnawing at his heart; an ageing man, with a wasted life behind him, a newly-arisen memory threatening to kill him; and only hoping for death as an extinction of consciousness. Not a creature near him. He was not one who could sit with his grooms—old habit was too strong for that. Yet, if one of them could only have exchanged words with him, he would have been glad. But he went into the stable-yard, and their voices were hushed at once. The smallest stable boy had only to glance at the Squire, to see that he was

in his darkest mood : they went on with their work carefully, and in silence. Little did they dream that the darkest hour is just before the dawn. Silcote would have given a hundred guineas for a kind word from any of them. But as he had sowed so he must reap. He had sown temper, and he reaped silence and solitude.

He was alone in the house. At least so he thought, in his selfish forgetfulness. But early in the afternoon he was standing in the flower-garden, behind a Deodara, when he noticed that there was a difficulty with one of the window-doors which opened from the breakfast-room into the garden. Some one was trying to undo it from the inside, with a view to coming out. At first the window was pushed at the top and pulled at the bottom, then it was pulled at the top and pushed at the bottom. Then the person inside discovered that it was bolted, and withdrew the bolt ; after which the window came open by the run, and there was some kind of accident inside, which sounded as though some one had fallen over two or three chairs, and had likewise broken something in the nature of china. Lastly, Silcote, watching the now open window with

great curiosity, saw come out of it a mild little lady in goloshes, and recognised Anne's governess, Miss Heathton.

He looked forward with great eagerness to this chance of getting away from himself; and advanced towards her with alacrity and politeness. She would have fled, had there been time, but he was too near to her when she saw him, and she had to strike her colours, and submit.

"A fine day, Miss Heathton," said the Squire.

"A very fine day, indeed, sir."

It was nothing of the kind, being a perfect brute of a November day; but it did to open the conversation.

"I have relieved you of your pupil for a few days, Miss Heathton: you shall have a little peace."

"I am glad my dear pupil should have some change. I should have little difficulty with her, I think, if she saw more society."

"It shall be as you wish," said Silcote, wishing almost madly to conciliate *some* one. "You have travelled?"

"All over Europe."

"Should you consider it as a part of our contract to travel with Anne?"

"I will do so with the deepest pleasure."

"Good. I will set about it. I have a carriage which I think will do. If I find it won't I will buy a new one. And now where would you like to go? What do you say to the Holy Land, now, to begin with? You are a very religious woman, it would just suit you."

"My dear sir! so sudden. You take away my breath."

"Find it again. What do you say to the Nile, or Norway, or Jan Mayen's Land, or the Cape of Good Hope, or Boulogne?"

"I should think Boulogne to begin with, sir."

"So I should think also. How perfectly your ideas chime with mine! What a sensible woman you must be! Yes, I would begin at Boulogne, or Calais, if you prefer, and work through France into Italy. You might get to Rome for the Holy Week, but don't keep the girl in Rome after Easter. Come north as the spring gets on."

"Your wishes shall be attended to in every respect, sir. May I make a suggestion?"

"Madam, you are here to make suggestions, and I to attend to them."

"Then may I remark that the Holy Week at Rome is a somewhat dangerous trial for a young and impulsive girl like Anne, who has been kept so closely secluded from the world?"

"Dangerous! I have been at it and never saw any danger. Except in the illuminations of the dome, and that is done by convicts, and, by-the-by, is not in the Holy week at all."

"She is very impetuous; and, according to your desire, I have only given her the most ordinary religious education. I think there is a danger of her being dangerously attracted by the Romish ceremonial."

"I have forgotten all about these things. I understand you to mean that she would be likely to turn Papist?"

"That is certainly my meaning. She has never seen any form of ceremonialism in religion yet, and will be very likely, as far as I dare judge from her very eager nature, to be dangerously attracted by the externals of the lowest form of Christianity; the Romish."

"There spoke the governess,—I beg pardon; I want to be civil to you, and induce you to be my companion for the day. But other girls go to Rome and don't turn Romanist; why should she?"

"She has not been treated as girls usually are. She has been mewed up here too long (forgive my boldness). Anne is a girl of great mental activity, and of great determination. The only outlet she has ever had for that mental activity has been leading me the life of a dog. She is not amiable, Mr. Silcote. She is far from amiable." (Miss Heathton lost her very little temper, a very little bit, just here). "I never thought that I should have gained courage to tell you this, but you are different to-day from what I have ever seen you before. And Anne is not amiable, Mr. Silcote. Far from it."

Miss Heathton had found out, like a true woman, that Silcote was in a bullyable mood, and nailed her little colours to her weak little mast.

"Well," growled Silcote, "I have heard all that before. She is a Turk. I will allow that; but what makes you think she will turn Papist?"

"I think, sir, that it is extremely probable with a

girl like her, who has been kept here without any sphere whatever for her great mental activity; not to mention her obstinacy and ill temper: that such a girl will find in the first decent form of religion, which she comes across, an outlet for her great——”

“Obstinacy and ill-temper,” growled out Silcote. “Well, and a good job too. Let the girl turn Papist if she pleases: as long as she don’t bring the priests into the house. Let her turn Papist. According to your own Protestant confession, it would give her an outlet for her obstinacy and ill-temper, which I am sure is very much wanted. Let her turn Papist; it is no sort of consequence to me.”

Miss Heathton paused for a few moments before she had her *ultimatum* ready; then, with as much dignity as can be shown by a lady in goloshes, she drew herself up, and presented it.

“Mr. Silcote, I beg to renew the warning I gave you a few days ago,—as far as my memory will serve me, the day before yesterday. I cannot any longer remain in the establishment of a gentleman who has proved that all forms of religion are a matter of utter indifference to him. Of morality I say nothing.”

"Who on earth asked you?" said the exasperated Silcote. "Am I to keep my head in an everlasting beehive for the rest of my life? Is there to be no peace for me at all? Arthur bullies me, Anne bullies me, Betts bullies me. Algernon turns his pale face and grey head upon me, and says that if things have gone wrong it is entirely my fault, and that I am answerable for everything. The woman Sugden turns on me and worries me like a cat-a-mountain, and now my very granddaughter's governess has taken up the tune, and gives me warning because she won't say anything on the 'score of morality.' Did I understand you aright, madam?"

"My words were, sir, that I would say nothing on the score of morality. My complaint is that of indifference in religion. Indifferentism in religion becomes, in extreme cases, a moral fault. When I alluded to morality, I merely alluded to that."

"Very well. Then we will keep the girl from turning Papist. Now let us be agreeable and comfortable. I really want to consult you about many things."

"Agreeable I will try to be, sir; comfortable never.

I am glad that I have the courage to say thus much thus early before matters have gone any further."

Silcote bowed, and committed himself no further. He said afterwards to Arthur and Algernon, "Why, that very old governess of Anne's thought once that I was going to propose to her, and choked me off. I seem to have come into the world with two left hands, two left legs, and somebody else's tongue. I am a man of strong will, and of great obstinacy ; yet I never did, never do, and never shall do, the thing I mean."

By degrees Silcote and Anne's governess got into the ordinary channel of conversation. They were commonplace and polite at first. Miss Heathton went to the grave with the impression that Silcote had proposed to her, and that she had refused him. Miss Raylock ranks her among Spartan women on the strength of this story, or rather on Miss Heathton's perfectly honest development of the little incident mentioned above. Our business, however, is with their subsequent conversation, which, in allowance for human patience, shall be abridged. We, with our readers' interest in our eyes, pick it up at this point. Miss Heathton said, "This extreme and almost fierce opposition to Romanism

appears to arise from two causes. The first, sir, the inordinate political pretensions of the Pope, which would prevent any English Catholic from being a true and hearty subject to a Protestant sovereign ; and next, sir, the inordinate pretension of the priests to dictate in our domestic arrangements. Such are, as far as my judgment can guide me, the insuperable objections to that particular form of Christianity, and those two objections are, in my humble judgment, insuperable."

"I agree with you, madam, most entirely. You were subsidized—I hope the term don't offend you—for the purpose of expressing exactly that sort of opinion. You have done it in the most admirable manner. Bah ! I am vexed and teased, and I fear I get rude. Your opinion, madam, is Philistine, but it is true. Could not we talk of something else ?"

Not if Miss Heathton could help it. "I was, as you so truly say, sir, subsidized as expressing the *juste milieu* of modern, liberal thought. When I cease to do so, my engagement with you is at an end. I am at a loss to know why the expression 'Philistine'—which, I confess, I do *not* understand—should be applied to any utterance of mine. There can be nothing in it in any way offensive

to an unprotected lady, or a man of the known courtesy of Mr. Silcote could never have uttered it."

"Offensive! My dear madam! Why, I am a Philistine myself. God bless you, I have wrecked my whole life on Philistine principles."

"I am delighted to hear that, sir," said the governess. "I was certain that our principles were the same. Now Miss Lee is a case in point."

"In point of what?" asked Silcote—"Philistine!"

"A case in point of what we were talking about," said Miss Heathton.

"What *were* we talking about?"

"Romanism, you know, and all that."

"Exactly," said Silcote. "And Miss Lee?"

"Why, Miss Lee as a case in point."

"And who is Miss Lee, and what point does she illustrate?"

"Do you mean to say you have not heard?"

"I have heard you, madam, for the last half hour, but what you are talking about I am at a loss to understand. Try a fact after such a mass of generalisations, if it is only for a change. Give us Miss Lee as a fact, and let us generalise from her. We really must start

somewhere ; let us start at Miss Lee. She is really the first tangible point we have come across in our conversation. I do not remember her, but she seems a fact. And do you know that you and I want facts sadly ? Words won't do for ever. If you find yourself equal to answering for the personality and existence of this Miss Lee, let us have her and discuss her."

"Miss Lee, sir, is a friend of mine. Her whole early life was spent in an utter blank of ignorance. She was scarcely educated, left utterly unprovided for, and of course did what all poor girls in her situation do. Being perfectly respectable, perfectly ignorant, and utterly unused to teaching, she of course sought a position, which probably requires a more painfully careful training, and certainly involves more responsibility, than any other. She took a situation as governess."

"Don't be hard on her, madam," said Silcote. "She was rash, and had probably not calculated on the awful weight of moral responsibility which attaches to the post. We do not find such women as Miss Heathton every day."

Miss Heathton bowed a condescending little bow at

the compliment, but, of course, did not waste breath in confirming such an obvious truism. "The first revelation which Miss Lee ever had of a higher life came through a very highly educated young priest."

"Bless the parsons!" said the Squire.

"*And,*" said Miss Heathton, with dignity, "I much regret to say that I cannot approve of the conduct of that young priest, however much I may admire him personally."

"You admire him? Handsome?"

"Singularly. He educated her, he introduced her to higher things; to history, not merely secular, but, I regret to say, ecclesiastical. He improved her wretched music, and in doing that took her away from her legitimate sphere at the piano, taught her the harmonium, and introduced her to such dangerous pieces as the 'Stabat Mater.' He also incited her to church needlework and church decorations, and ultimately took her to Wells Street."

"These priests are always at it, you know. But what the dickens did they go to Wells Street for?"

"He took her to Wells Street, sir, to sap and undermine her Church principles, sir. But he did worse

than that. He gave rise to hopes in her breast, sir, which, if he ever meant to fulfil, he has never fulfilled as yet, and, indeed, is little likely to do so."

"Oh, the villain! And what did he do then?"

"Left her utterly without guidance, sir. The clergyman in whose family she was governess took to the same benighted courses; but he did not go far enough for her. The young priest of whom I speak, himself a renegade to the High Church party, held the prize of religious peace, of a soul-destroying, conscience-killing life of active good works and ornamental religion, before her, and then left her, without guidance, to follow that perfectly worthless prize, whithersoever it might lead her, alone. She loved him once, but I doubt if she loves him any more. He deserted her as no gentleman would have deserted her, because she was poor, and could not help his ambition; but the poison he first put in her veins has acted better than he would wish, if he knew all. She is rich beyond telling now, and he is only a sad memory of a faithless and unworthy man to her. Meantime she, in her ignorance, in her blindness, in her disappointed passion, has gone forward on the road which he first pointed out to her; towards

irresponsibility, towards what the poor fool considers peace, towards Rome. She is nearly there now."

"You tell your story well. Go on. I knew of these things once."

"I feel it, but I think I tell it but poorly. The poor girl thinks that, by accepting tradition, she can relieve herself of the responsibility of thinking for herself; that she can, by placing her conscience in the hands of a half-educated priest, bury the talent of intellect and free thought and free will with which God has largely gifted her. I would sooner have seen her dead. I would sooner that her soul stood bare before God to-morrow than see this. And *he* did it. He introduced her to the means, but, like a craven, would not guide her to the end."

"There is something in the air of this place," said Silcote, "which makes every one talk himself into a passion. We shut ourselves up too much here. There is nothing so bad for the temper as shutting yourself up. There was Anne yesterday broke out. I have hardly behaved like a gentleman in all points of this afternoon's conversation, for I have exhibited passion. Now you yourself, gentlest and mildest of

women, have lost your temper over a priest. (I never had any temper at their disposal, therefore I could not lose it.) That outrageous glorious daughter in—I should say daughter of democracy, Mrs. Sugden, must have got her powers of blowing up during her residence on this secluded and desolate hill of Boisey. Let us hope that the Thames which winds round its base will not catch fire. Now, madam?"

"You recall me, sir. You mentioned Mrs. Sugden just now, I think?"

"Half a minute ago."

"Do you know where she is?"

"No," said the Squire, most promptly. ("I don't, you know," he made it out to himself; "she may be in the buttery or the dormitory, or for the matter of that anywhere;") but added, with more devotion than usual, "God forgive me for a lie.")

"Mrs. Sugden," pursued the governess, "is Miss Lee's cousin, and co-heiress with her in this vast fortune. She is supposed to be dead, and if she is not found in a certain time, as I am given to understand, Miss Lee takes the whole of the fortune, eight

thousand a year, and Miss Lee is either at Rome or near it."

"The deuce! I will save four thousand a year if need be; but perhaps she is better as she is. Meanwhile you have interested me about this Miss Lee. Can't we save *her* four thousand a year from the priests? There is Arthur, a handsome young fellow to snatch a brand from the burning. Let us see what *he* can do. He can manage me at times; he ought to be able to manage her."

"Sir, you have misconceived me."

"I cannot see how, madam."

"This young priest of whom I have spoken is your son Arthur. Miss Lee, as I presumed you remembered, was your eldest son Algernon's governess: *voilà tout*."

"Do you mean to tell me that this Miss Lee, with the four thousand a year, is that two-penny girl I choked—I mean warned—Arthur from?"

"Certainly, sir."

"He must have been mad."

"Only prudent, my dear sir," said Miss Heathton.
"He did not know about the four thousand a year."

Another word before we go in about Mrs. Sugden. She has a very high opinion of your family, and evidently knows something of it. It was she who wrote to her cousin, urging on her the acceptance of the situation as governess in your eldest son's house."

And so Miss Heathton took her goloshes inside, and left the Squire in somewhat of a rage.

He had a fancy, later in the evening, to go gently to the school-room, and see if he could get Miss Heathton to gossip again. Gently opening the door, he found that there was an old-fashioned four-fold screen in front of it, put there to keep Miss Heathton's legs from the draught. He slyly looked round it, and there were Miss Heathton and, moreover, Miss Raylock, with tea and toast, sitting over the fire and baking their insteps. He was no listener, but he could not help hearing Miss Raylock say: "My dear, Silcote knows where Mrs. Sugden is well enough. That little expression of his, 'I will save four thousand a year if need be,' shows it. And, if her husband is dead, and if I know human nature, he will marry her. Silcote would sell his soul for another four thousand a year."

"Confound that old woman," he said to himself. "She is the chorus to our family tragedy. And she is so confoundedly clever that she always goes beyond the mark, and her moral reflections on the state of affairs are never right. I wish she would study the Greek model, and not commit herself too far in advance of facts. And old Raylock would marry me to-morrow if I asked her. And I should hang myself that day se'nnight."

And then again over his solitary dinner he thought: "That noble wife of my most rascally son Tom, what is to be done with her? Not a soul knows where she is except myself, and possibly her half-brother. She is well off, and in her way happy. I shan't tell her about this fortune of hers. Tom would spend it all. I must go to town and see this will. I shall not disturb her yet; certainly not till I send the boy to Italy. He had better be kicked about: I ought to have been kicked about more. Suppose that I can keep her there in ignorance for a time, and send the boy to Italy, and so wait? Tom must not have her money."

CHAPTER XIII.

AND WE HEAR ALL ABOUT MRS. THOMAS.

THE next morning Silcote received a very large and very long letter from Mrs. Thomas Silcote, which, without any comment, we subjoin, with the Squire's remarks.

"I promised to tell you all about myself, and I feel I can do so better by letter than *viva voce*.

"My father was a very small freehold farmer in Devonshire. His farm was so small that both he and my half-brother worked on it like common hinds, and as soon as I was old enough I helped.

"I got some schooling, I think about four days in the week, on the average, working on the others. I was a shabby poor drudge on working days, but, after the habit of West country girls, I made up for it on

Sundays. I was gay enough then, and I think I had a good taste in dress. My father was the second time a widower, and, until I was sixteen, we three (my father, my half-brother, and myself) lived happily together. My father was a good and kind man. My love for and gratitude to my brother are not to be expressed in words. I shall see him soon.

“I had few pleasures, my father and brother none at all. We lived a hard and dull life, in spite of the beauty of the country, and the exquisite softness of the climate. But periodically used to come two or three days together of real unalloyed pleasure. Dressed in my best clothes I used to walk to Exeter, eighteen miles away, and stay with an old aunt, who kept a very small shop in the lower part of the town, in a narrow street, which, with its bustle and life, was a paradise to me after our solitary little farm among the folding monotonous hills.

“On one of these expeditions, I was going steadily along the broad highway, wanting still six miles from the city, when I heard behind me a clattering of horses' hoofs and a jingling of steel; and, turning, saw three dragoons who clanked swiftly past, and dis-

appeared round a turn in the road under a deep red cliff. I had not done admiring them when I saw the main body who followed them, and had to take as good care of myself as I could.

“They were not going much beyond a foot pace, and I drew against a gate to let them pass; and, as there were about two hundred, they were some time, during which I was exposed to every kind of jocular salutation. I wonder whether officers could prevent their men from insulting every woman they meet while marching; I suppose not. However, they passed in time, and I, girl-like, hurried on after them, to see as much of them as possible.

“I was still so near them that I could hear the clank of their accoutrements and the tumult of their voices; and I was so absorbed in my girlish admiration of their gallantry and magnificence as they wound along between the dull red cliffs and the sparkling river, that I was unconscious that a solitary horseman was beside me until he spoke. A bold, clear, and yet very gentle voice said close to my ear, ‘I hope the men have not been rude to you. We recruit, you know, from the wildest class in the community, but not from the

lowest. Those men are rough and free in their salutations, yet they are soldiers, and I do not think there is one of them who would not protect you from real insult as boldly and as freely as I would myself.'

"As his sweet delusive voice fell on my ear, I turned and saw him, the man himself, may God forgive him, for the first time. A beautiful youth, all scarlet and gold, and steel, bending from his saddle, and looking gently and respectfully into my eyes.

" 'He was a lovely youth I guess :
The panther in the wilderness
Was not so fair as he."

"Well, my fate has not been Ruth's, though but for God's mercy it might have been. Could I help looking frankly back into those frank young eyes (for he was frank and true then, Squire), and thanking him for his courtesy and solicitude in my bold free way?

" 'They are wild and free,' he went on, but they are not all evil. You are not one who should believe so, at all events, for they mainly come from your own class. And when they get an officer who will sympathise with them and trust them, they will follow him through fire and smoke and the horror of death, seeing not the ter-

rors of mutilation or extinction (for they are all irreligious) before them, but only trying for an infinitesimal share of the great glory of some noble deed of arms, which alters history and leaves a mark on the face of time. These roughly-trained boors (forgive me, for you belong to their order, though the women in that class are so much superior to the men) fight, not for personal honour, but for the honour of the number of their regiment. The officers get rewarded; I, as one of them, should be rewarded, if I led some two hundred of them to a ghastly death under creditable circumstances. I, as an officer, get my reward in personal prestige, either to myself living, or to my memory dead; these poor sheep fight for the honour of a number. Could you or I fight to the bitter end for the honour of the number 140, which is the number of this regiment? I think not? These men deserve respect?"

When the Squire had read so far he laid down the letter, and walked up and down the room. "How clever this woman is! That is Tom, you know, his own self. What a special pleader he would have made!" Then he resumed:—

"I cannot tell what I answered; but it was all over,

and I loved him. He was the most beautiful and the most splendidly-dressed creature I had ever met. He spoke of new and noble things to me in a voice I had never heard before, and in a tone of confidential respect which flattered me exceedingly. I knew what other women of my class know, but I had no fear of him. I met his eyes boldly and fearlessly, and said,

“‘I respect them for their valour, but we peasants dislike, as a rule, having soldiers in our houses. They sell themselves to die, and prepare themselves for death by making themselves unfit to meet God:’ those were the very words I used to him. They were very strange ones for an uneducated peasant-girl, you will say. But we were Wesleyan.

(“They would have been strange, madam,” was Silcote’s commentary, “in any one but yourself. But you are so utterly passing strange, that I wonder you confined yourself to such a very ordinary remark. So you were an uneducated Wesleyan at one time? Well, I am glad you confined yourself to that.”)

“He, Thomas, went on. ‘You have walked far,’ he said. ‘I was sitting in the inn at Crediton, looking out of the window, when you came up, dusty even then

and sat on the bench before the window. And I watched your face for twenty minutes as you sat and rested, and I saw in your face purpose and power. I am very young, and have seen no more of the world than any other young coxcomb of a dragoon officer ; but I have brains enough to see that much. That is why I spoke to you.'

"If he had flattered my beauty, my dear father-in-law, I should have been on my guard in a moment. Our class is so far armed against yours, that we know what you mean when you begin *that*. What he did was quite of another kind. He talked freely with me, as to a woman with an intellect quite equal, if not superior, to his own. He discussed with me the question of small freeholds, and disagreed with me flatly when I defended them on the grounds of tradition ; as I did, as well as my ignorance would allow, making up in bold, possibly fierce, denunciation what I lacked in logic. Half way between Cowley Bridge and Exeter, he suddenly reminded me that we had been five miles together, and that we could scarcely enter the town on the same terms. Then he rode off, and I became aware of my indiscretion ; I had been walking for five miles

beside a dragoon officer and a gentleman (they are the dangerous class to us), and I did not know who might have seen us. I slept at my aunt's that night, and never moved out of the house. The next morning I set my face steadily homewards, in spite of the old lady's remonstrances. On my walk I passed the head-quarters of the regiment, and received the usual salutations, which I received with great scorn, in spite of the pleading of my cornet. I got home very late at night, when they were gone to bed.

James opened the door to me. 'Sister,' he said, 'what brings you home so soon, and why do you look so wild?'

"I answered, 'I am come home because home is the best place for me. If I look wild it is because I have seen heaven, and am bound in all probability to live fifty years more on earth. Are you going to begin peas-hacking to-morrow?'

"'Yes. But something has gone wrong, sister. Tell me what.'

"'There'll be a short crop, I doubt,' I answered. 'I wish we could knock enough money together to drain that four-acre. We have had peas three years running

on that field, and the pigs don't pay. We are taking more off the land than we are putting in. That can't go on for ever.'

"I would not tell him anything; indeed, what had I to tell? Weeks afterwards he went to Exeter, and on coming back told me privately that a Cornet Silcote of the 140th Dragoons had set some of his troopers to watch my aunt's house, and that they had made every inquiry after me. I then knew that I must have been watched to my aunt's, for I am certain I had never told him even my name. This made me distrust him for a time. A very short time, for I loved him; and, although it was wicked of him to watch me, yet—shall I say it?—it was a compliment.

"No more Exeter expeditions now. There was a lion in the path. Peas harvest, barley harvest, wheat harvest, toil, heat, and the old squalid dress once more. Then the acorn hunting for the pigs, and a little revival of vitality when we killed at intervals two pigs for our own use, and lived on them as long as they lasted—not long in that hot moist climate. Then winter, with sweeping deluges of rain from Dartmoor, and a diet of bad bread and sour cider; all

things—tithe, taxes, and everything—getting in arrear. Then my brother fell sick, and times got harder yet. I took his gun (for my father was nearly past his work) and I shot golden plover on the moor, a bird which will be still till you are close to him; and then getting bolder I fired at snipe, and killed them too; and lastly, unassisted, learnt to shoot woodcock. I put my bare arms into the half-frozen streams and pulled out the trout: and once in my innocence, passing through a village near us with my brother's gun on my shoulder, and a quantity of golden plover in my hand, the whole population, children especially, turned out, and hooted and hissed me, as some one who had done an unnatural thing in trying to keep her father and her brother from the workhouse. I sneaked home by by-ways after that.

“ But through it all, fool as I was, I had a companion, —a companion whom I could never see, but whom I often addressed. The image of my young friend the cornet of dragoons was always by me now; though often I wished it far away.

“ For it made me ashamed of my squalor and poverty sometimes; sometimes do I say?—nearly always. He

so perfect, so noble, so splendidly decorated—I so squalid, so untidy, and so rude : an object for the laughter of the children of the village. Times were very hard and bitter with us that winter, as I told you before ; and I, a girl of seventeen, was left to fight everything single-handed. I used to go shooting (there was no game-preserving in our part of the country), in a coat made out of an old sack, and my shoes got so bad that I left them at home and went bare-footed. This would have been a deadly offence against the respectability of the villagers, had it been known, but our farm was very secluded, and I managed to creep away into the woodlands generally unobserved. Out-lying woodcutters and shepherds saw me sometimes, and reported me mad. I did not discourage this idea.

“ But always, whether on the highest roll of the moorland after the golden plover and snipe, or in the depths of holly and oak after the woodcock, or with arms bare to the shoulder groping in the deadly cold water for the trout, the image of the young dragoon was beside me. Sometimes in my early solitary walks, imagining he had found me in my degradation, I would defy him and cast him off, tell him our ways were dif-

ferent, that he saw what I was, and that he should leave me on his honour. At another time I pleaded with him, told him how I was doing all this only for the sake of my father and my sick brother, and prayed him to help us. The fancy, however, which oftenest possessed me about him was this: that old Mr. Lee of Swincombe, our distant Devonshire cousin, was dead, and had left me all his great fortune; and that I came before my dragoon like a princess in satins and jewels, and, by delivering him from dire necessity and disgrace, had him at my feet.

("By Jove," said Silcote, "how extraordinary! Just what has happened—so far; but I will hold my peace.")

"And so I fed my fancy with him until the course of my life was quite changed—not by an accident, it was simply in the course of events; but in this wise:—

"The only large proprietor about those parts was the Duke of Cheshire, who had a little cottage *ornée* on the edge of the moor among the woodlands, with nearly a thousand acres around it. The land was not preserved, indeed there was little or nothing to shoot there, and I used to range through it unforbidden.

“ I had heard that Lord Wargrave, the Duke’s eldest son, had come there to spend his honeymoon. My brother, who had crept out into the village, brought me this news, and told me also how his lordship’s brother had been killed in a duel, and that Mr. Austin Elliot was in prison for taking part in it, and that the wedding had been quite quiet. I heard it with one ear and forgot it with the other ; and, thinking little in my eagerness of bride or bridegroom, wandered into those very woods the next day.

“ I heard men’s voices—one the voice of a gentleman, in the wood—and two shots were fired. I fled, not because I feared any bad consequences from trespassing, for the Duke was known to us as a gentle man ; the largest owner amongst those miserable little holdings, and consequently the only man who could afford to be a good landlord. I fled because I dreaded to be seen in my miserable guise by a gentleman ; and tearing my bare feet among brambles, with a gun in my hand, a coat made of a sack upon my back, and my head perfectly bare, I blundered through copse and brake until I got into an open glade, and looking round, while I paused for breath, I found myself face to face within

three feet of the bride, who was sitting quietly on a block of granite, waiting while the bridegroom amused himself by shooting through the wood.

“You know her glorious beauty, and you may conceive how she was dressed. I was a figure which might have upset most people’s nerves : barefooted, bareheaded, with my wild hair about my face, and clothed in my ragged sackcloth, I came suddenly bursting on her with a loaded gun in my hand, and I fear a wild stare in my eyes, which has died out now, Silcote.

“ But she was not at all afraid of me. The blood of the men of her family has so often made fertile the corn-fields of Europe, that cowardice has ceased to be one of the vices imputed to her family (and there are plenty of them). Her little silly dog at the sight of me at first barked furiously upon her lap, but, not feeling safe from such a fearful figure as I was, even under her protection, broke away from her, and ran yelping down the glade. I stood before her utterly abashed, with the gun in my hand, and she, rising, came quietly out to meet me, with wonder and pity in her eyes.

“ ‘My dear,’ she said, ‘ what has brought you to this pass ?’

"I am ready with my tongue; and I answered her quickly, 'Empty barn and empty fold; cold house, cold hearth, cold bed, hungry body, and hungry heart: these things have brought me to this pass, my lady.'"

" 'My dear,' she said, 'how beautiful you are.'"

" 'I might say the same of you, my lady.'"

"She blushed, and said, 'Where do you live? In our happiness we must do something for you.'"

"I told her; for the hearth was cold, harvest far off, and the bread-winners of the house struck down.

" 'Wait a little, my dear,' she said, 'my husband will be here directly.'"

" 'I cannot face a gentleman as I am,' I said, and fled away. She was the only one connected with my new life who ever saw me in my degradation; and she kept her secret.

"They came next day, and I was dressed out in my best, so that she scarcely knew me. Her husband was with her: a tall handsome man, with that gentle plastic Barty face, which is so familiar to me now.

"She had won me, and I followed her away. He bought my father's farm, and the money he paid for the purchase was enough to see him into his grave in

comfort. I went with her. James went again into the deep clay fallows, turning the tread-mill of this bitter agricultural life. And I used to write to him four times a year, regularly. Was it not good of me? And was he not grateful for the attention? There was I, a lady or at least a lady's maid; and there was he missing me every hour out of the twenty-four, and toiling in the fallows. But I wrote to him regularly four times a year, and he was grateful.

"I cannot dwell on this period. They spoilt me. For the first time, and the last time in my life, I was artificial, false, and ungrateful to my brother. They were all as good as gold, I *will* say that for them; but their words, their ideas, were nothing but wind. Among them, words and party cries had got crystalized into articles of belief. You have, doubtless, seen the same thing among very different people—Radical, Whig, and Tory alike. But they educated me in their way, and I grew to be a fine lady. Well! well! I have lingered long on the prettiest half of my story. I will be briefer with the rest.

"We were at Dunstegan Castle in Scotland, and there was a great company there. The Duke and

Duchess of Rosshire were entertaining the world. Royalty was there at one time, and went in its turn; but the departure of Royalty put no check on the festivities. In this age, with a democracy creeping slowly on, I suppose such a state of things will soon become impossible. All *I* have to say about it is that it was very beautiful, perfectly harmless—as far as ostentation and extravagance can be harmless—and that it enriched that barren and meagre quarter of Scotland enormously. But it was too exciting. Calm thought was utterly impossible. There was no repose. It was one succession of beautiful and magnificent scenes, from the early morning, when the swarming kilts began to awaken from the places where they lay, and collect in the courts, to the last hour of the light northern night, when the latest dancers crept to rest, to renew the wild splendid dissipation the next day: the men to the moor, the women to the carriages and horses, the gardens and the river and the shore. Every one was *tête montée*, I among the number.

“I did not know who was there, and who was not. They came and went swarm after swarm. When a cabinet minister or a foreign prince came, we, the

quieter and higher servants, heard of it, and peeped over banisters to get a look at him ; but of the general company we knew nothing. I was, too—my personal appearance—I had reasons for being—very quiet. I kept mostly in my lady's rooms. At last came the Duchess of Rosshire's birthday, and there was to be a great ball in which all the servants were to take part.

"I was intensely delighted. We talked about it for days before. It was understood among us that the factor was to open the ball with the Duchess, and the Duke with the housekeeper. After this there was to be an entirely democratic selection of partners. Any one of us might have the sublime chance of dancing with a peer of the realm (and getting a wound not easily healed, a bitter festering wound of discontent and vanity, for if their order understand anything more than another it is the art of making themselves agreeable to women). We talked about it, and with our silly heads half off our shoulders, we went down into the hall : the *select* group among the servants, and stood or sat in a bevy together.

"The gentlemen were wandering about looking for

partners, but a quantity of them were exactly opposite to us, and began to look at us,—not in the least rudely, I give them all that credit. I selected my partner from among them at once; Lord Tullygoram—young, handsome, good-natured, in the kilt, and covered all over with silver and cairngorm stones—took my fancy. My feet were patting the floor in anticipation of the idiotic excitement of dancing, and he looked like a partner worth dancing with. I saw that he was coming towards me, and I was ready for him.

“But it was fated that I was not to dance with him. Another eye had been on him and on me, and his lordship danced with the still-room maid.

“He was too deliberate in his motions. While he was calmly coming across the hall, with what is popularly supposed to be the deliberate stride of the native mountaineer, a figure came between me and him, and obscured him,—the figure of a tall man, in ordinary English evening dress. This man said to me, ‘You must dance with me first to-night, if it is only for the sake of that precious and never-forgotten talk I had with you on the road between Crediton and Exeter, when I pretended that my horse was lame, that I might

keep pace with your dear, weary little feet. And so I have found you at last.'

"It was Thomas; was it not like him? *You* know his tongue.

"Well. There came a quieter time, but we stayed on there, and he stayed on. And then we went to another Scotch house, and the end of it was he came after me, and we were married before witnesses, in the Scotch way. End of it, I say?—no, the end of it was that he left me before my boy was born, and went abroad with his regiment. You know his vague purposeless way. You know how he never will face facts. You, who have paid his debts so often, must know that. When he got tired of me, he did not choose to face the fact of my being his wife. He left me to assert it; and I would have died in the workhouse sooner than do that.

"I went straight back to my good brother, and told him the truth. I can make him do anything. I made him move up into Berkshire, and live in that cottage outside your park-gates. Why, I cannot tell you exactly. To be near him, and yet away from him. To have the chance of seeing him sometimes, yet with

a certainty almost that I should never see him. He was faithless to me ; I knew that. But why go on to analyse the motives of a wronged, angry, and fierce woman, whose motives were entirely passionate, and never reasonable. I have been tamed since I parted with you in the garden.

“ I believe that I have outlived my love for him. I cannot say, but I think so. My first purpose in coming to live at your gates was a mere whim of a fanciful temper ; but we got there into utter poverty, into the deep clay rut of agricultural life, from which there is no turning. My soul got deadened with the everlasting weary routine, and utter poverty once more became a habit. My brother might have spoken and urged me to appeal to old friends ; but my brother is one of that order which seldom speaks, except in blazing ricks : the habit of his order kept him silent.

“ How many years did I live there bringing up your grandson on your own estate ? Nearly twelve, I think. And my bitter, fierce temper lasted all that time. James and I passed for man and wife for convenience’ sake. I drudged in the fields with him, and we had a hard life of it. My boy grew in beauty and intelligence, and

I educated him ; but I had a bitter feud against the upper orders, and I determined that he should not be in any way connected with them. In my darkest hours I used to say that he should avenge my wrongs against the order which had wronged me. That this was a folly madder than your own, I will allow ; but I was as mad as this once.

“ It was a weary time, Silcote,—a dull time. I have a considerable sense of humour, and I love amusement. I had nothing to amuse me all that time, with one exception. If it had not been for that one thing which kept my sense of humour still alive, I might have gone mad. It is possible. But there was one object always before me, which made me laugh, which kept up some sort of communication with the world I had left, through my sense of humour,—which means, I take it, sympathy, in the main. What was that object ? Why, I will tell you. It was you yourself : the dreadful Dark Squire Silcote, who went swearing and scolding about among his bloodhounds. If I had known, as I do now, how deeply and shamefully you had been abused, I should have sympathised with you. But in those times you were always, to me, a great standing absurdity. (Yes,

my dear Silcote, you may pitch this letter to the other end of the room, but I never was a bit afraid of you, and I am not now.)”

(Silcote had actually done that same thing. But after having picked the letter up again, and read the paragraph between brackets, as above, he felt terribly guilty, and only said, “Confound the woman.”)

“You were then ridiculous to me. At first I thought you merely ill-conditioned; but watching you very closely, and hearing a great deal about you, I changed my opinion of you. You were still ridiculous—and you are now, you know, when in your old mood; but I begun to say to myself, ‘That man is not the mere fantastic ruffian he wishes to appear.’ I was confirmed in my opinion. The peasant drudges about you gave you a good character, a character which many a smooth-faced, gentle-spoken man would be glad to have. They told me of many acts of kindness and generosity which you had done, and for which they in their way loved you. These acts of kindness were done in a brutal and coarse way, but they are used to brutality and coarseness, and the effects of your good acts, and the memory of them, remained

behind, in these peasants' minds, long after the coarse words with which they were accompanied had died out in their ears.

"So I studied you, until I got in a small degree to pity you, and, last and strangest of all, to love you. I thought we had something in common; I knew not what. Who can predicate either quality or accident of a woman's soul, which traverses so fantastically all your well-built average rules? (We are the only true radicals; keep us on a Christian basis, if you can manage it for us.) I got to love you, Silcote; and got to trust you.

"I had never seen my husband all this long time. He had been often at Silcotes for a short time, yet I never had seen him. I have done evil by him. I might have reclaimed him. Though he had thrown me over, yet he practically allowed that he dared not marry, for he never, in his most prosperous times, attempted to do so. I saw him again after twelve years, and the sight of him stirred me, I cannot say why, to new action.

"The gamekeeper roused us in the night to tell us the poachers were in the wood, and standing in

the doorway I saw *him* outside in the moonlight. My brother went out to fight for ~~the~~ game in which he had no share—to fight on the mere instincts of his order ~~against~~ lawless and inexcusable vagabonds. When I went upstairs to look at my darling in his bed, I found that he had escaped me, and had gone also. I lit a fire, and sat up for them, waiting. I could not pray then, but I could think.

“I could think, but I could come to no conclusion. I was not certain of my legal position, and dreaded branding my boy with illegitimacy, and ruining his life in that way. My brother was brought home to me, half killed in defending your game. My boy ran back to me in the morning, frightened to death by your bloodhounds, bruised fearfully; and then *you* came, and proposed to make my noble James, your own grandson; groom, page, steward’s-room boy, or what not, out of your high and mighty condescension.

“A worm will turn, and I am not a worm. I fear I scolded you sadly. But I saw that I must either claim my rank, or else put myself in a false position by staying where I was. When you had

proposed to me that morning to make your heir (for if Algernon is not righted, he *is* your heir) a groom, I determined to move. My brother was ready. The only question was about the boy.

"I gave you the boy. You remember our interview in the garden. I gave you the boy, and you have done well by him. I have no complaint to offer there. You have done better by the boy than I could have done myself. I thank you for it. Let the boy be, and let me be, as we were. Not a soul knows who I am or what I have been, except yourself and my brother. Wait.

"My brother. He is a soldier, a ten-year's man, invalided now from wounds got in the Crimea. Leave *him* alone, until I tell you what to do for him. As for James, let him go to Italy: and as for you, leave me here in peace. I can part with him again now, for a time. I have won the boy's love on a new ground. He would have loved me by tradition before; he loves me by choice now. Silcote, if that motherless boy were set to choose a mother from all the women in England, he would choose me, which is something.

"Leave things as they stand. Let the wheel go full circle. We are not so much worse off than our neighbours. There are things which trouble all the little Silcote world: I mean the little world which circles round you and your money. You are the greatest difficulty. I dread setting you right in your life-long mistake, but I will have it done nevertheless. You cannot gain anything by believing a lie about the only woman you ever loved: I say no more now; let us turn our attention to smaller matters. Arthur is in love with my cousin, Miss Lee, who has got all the Basset property, so James tells me (he might have left *me* something, I think); and Miss Lee will now have nothing to say to him. Can you set that right? There are other little troubles which you and I must see too. These children have grown up, while we have been foolishly wasting our lives on old loves and old grievances. These children are now grown up, and they have the foolish world-old habit of falling in love with one another. And there is mischief brewing amongst them.

"James and Dora are in love with one another.

I would not have it otherwise; but Reginald, our poor nonentity, is in love with Anne. A very nice arrangement among the cousins, but for this: that Anne is unhappily in love with James. It is to the credit of her good taste, I will allow; but it will breed desperate mischief. You say they are all children together: may be so, but turn your mind towards it. Reginald and Anne are dangerous characters. Reginald I have studied, Anne I only know from James. Be careful. Send James to Italy, and let Reginald go with him. That is my latest advice. Now, good-bye."

Silcote folded up the letter, and put it in his breast coat-pocket. "Italy, Italy, Italy, and all Italy together," he said. "James is to go to Italy, and Reginald with him. And Anne is to go to Italy. I have committed myself to that in a way, but she may be stopped at Baden. And my sister has not been there for a long time, and so may be considered almost due. And they are beginning to knock up another dust there, and so Frangipanni will go there if he can raise the money; and Sir Godfrey Mallory

has come home—a sure sign that there is mischief brewing. Old Raylock will get tired of toasting her old shins against my coals, and taking away my character afterwards, and *she'll* go. Then Arthur's health will give way, and *he'll* go. And then Mrs. Tom will get a new fancy for her precious husband, and *she'll* go. And Tom will be certainly quartered in Lombardy, and *he'll* be there, for the confusion of counsel. And then I shall get bored, and *I* shall go: and there will be no one left in England but Algernon and Dora, to do the respectabilities while we are smelling uselessly-burnt gunpowder. For, as I always tried to hammer into the wooden head of the man Garibaldi, you will do no good with that Sardinian monarchy. An Italian Federal republic is the only chance for them: and there is no chance of that. If they move, Austria and France will fight over them, and the winner will pick their bones. And Austria must win, her time has come. I may go and see the fight, and I'll be hanged if I can see why Dora should not come too. Hang Italy! Am I never to have done with it?"

CHAPTER XIV.

BREAKING UP.

DECEMBER had lain his hand on the lake at St. Mary's, and it was a sheet of grey ice, with here and there a wisp of white snow upon its surface. All around the level lines of the moorland were white against a grey sky, except where broken by the deep blackish-green of the Scotch fir woods. The beautiful building itself, generally of a pearl grey, now looked muddy-coloured and dirty amidst the blazing white of the snow-drift. Winter had come on the place, in short, and with winter breaking-up day, and for James and Reginald the last of St. Mary's for ever. We may leave Reginald.

James, with a glorious career just opening to him, panting and eager to begin it, was probably about as

happy as any mortal ever was in this world. Young, strong, clever, innocent, without regrets, but living in a glorified atmosphere of splendid hopes—I doubt if the human imagination could conceive of any man more unutterably happy. He had possibly a few sentimental memories just now, the effect of which was so mildly, deliciously mournful and pathetic, that they were even more charming than his glorious, jubilant, half-maddening confidence in the splendid future before him.

For the old place, so new and yet so old to him, had become very dear to him. He had “kenned the biggin’ o’ it,” as Edie Ochiltree says. There he had first made acquaintance with a very beautiful and happy life; and even in anticipation of the more beautiful life—the life which was to be spent among objects of Italian beauty, to which the dim wolds of Hampshire were cold and wan—even now, with a feeling of joy upon him near akin to that pain which they call, I think, præcordial anxiety, he had a few gentle regrets connected with the old place, which balanced his joy and made it bearable. Recall, if you are not too old, the last time you were *glad*; and you will more than half do my

work for me. But it was so long ago, you say. Still try to recall it. I suspect that it was the day you left school, or the day you first went to chapel in your cap and gown, or if you are in another rank in life, on the last day of your apprenticeship.

Impatiently going round and round the college, from chapel to dormitory, all the morning, and talking to his old friends who swarmed round him, did not quiet him very much. He was to go the next morning, but he could not think of having to say good-bye to any of them. They were all going, and he would, as he thought, certainly meet them again. He did not like to say good-bye to them, and persuaded himself that it would not be necessary. But there was one in that establishment to whom he must say good-bye, for he knew well that he should see his face no more: and so instead of going to dinner in hall at one o'clock, he went to the outer lodge at the end of the grounds, and, sitting down in the warm little parlour, took his old friend Ben Berry's hand in his, and looked wistfully into his face, saying not one word.

The old man was very old now: the clock was near stopping, and could not be wound up in this world.

But the withered, gnarled old hand, which James did not hold, went feebly up among the young man's curls, and lingered there lovingly.

"I knew you'd come," he said. "I never reported you on earth, but I'll report you in heaven. You have been a good boy to me."

James sat silent.

"You was a poor little boy when you came, but see what you've grown to. Similarly I ain't much to look at just now, though I was a fine young man once. Look at me, James, and keep me in your mind. If God gives you life and health, you'll be like me one day; and after that again — and after that again ——"

The old man said this sentence three or four times over, and James had tact enough not to speak: only to press the old fellow's hand. His feeble old mind went on another tack.

"Listening! Well, yes. You boys want a listner at times, and so do other folks. But I never reported a boy yet for anything I heard haphazard at a door, and I won't report her. There is nothing dishonourable in a school porter listening: but if he reports on it, he gets dishonourable, and deserves to lose his place. I'm

the oldest school porter in England, and I ought to know the international law between porter and boy, if any man does. And that's the law. And it extends to matrons and chairmen equally."

James thought he was wandering. "I start for Italy to-morrow, Ben," he said. "I have come—for I must say it—to say good-bye. You have been as kind and as faithful a friend as ever I had; and I thank you so very, very much. But I go to Italy to-morrow."

"To Italy to-morrow? I am bound on a longer journey, but I shall be at my journey's end before you for all that. Then good-bye. I can't make your face out clear. But be good to your mother as you were to me. Your mother is a woman in ten thousand. There is nothing you shouldn't do for your mother. Stick to her through thick and thin. A man never has a mother but once, and seldom such a mother as yours."

James made his farewell to the old fellow (who soon died), and went his way, believing him to be rambling in his mind. The half-year's prizes were to be given away that afternoon at two o'clock, and the County was coming. He thought for the time little about old Berry's wandering.

Sir Godfrey Mallory in a great barouche, all alone, dressed in priceless sables, with the fur inside, and shivering, was the first arrival. Silcote in a bran new travelling carriage (Anne's), and four horses with scarlet postilions, was so close after him that Silcote had time to dismount, and to look at Sir Godfrey Mallory as he got down. Sir Godfrey bowed and smiled at him, not in the least recognizing his old enemy ; and Miss Raylock, who had arrived in a fly from the nearest railway station, and had been forced to get out of it, having recognised the two carriages, for the purpose of seeing the meeting of the two old enemies and studying human nature, was stricken motionless in the snow.

And the rest of the County, who resided close by, were there. The frost had stopped the hunting, and there was nothing to do : and, as the foolish old song says, "Anything is fun in the country," and so they were to see the prizes given away ; manners preventing them from yawning in each other's faces ; sitting about on the benches, telling each other where they had dined every day for the last week, and finding out from one another where they were going to dine the next ; good, kindly, intelligent, honest folks as ever

lived, but more idiotic in their worship of mere habit than the Indians who are swung on hooks at a fair, leaving alone the fact that the Indian process has the advantage of cheapness, which the English form of prescriptive martyrdom has not. I suppose they both—as Mr. Mad Dick in “David Copperfield” says to the great indignation of Aunt Betsy—“do it for pleasure.”

However, here were the country folks, trying to gain a feeble amusement by seeing the prizes given away at St. Mary's, and they formed an important and imposing audience. Silcote gave away the prizes. Each master in turn gave aloud the names of the boys under his charge, and they were called up to receive them. Silcote did his work very well indeed, giving a few kindly sensible words, accompanied in every instance by a clever point or epigram, to each of the boys as he came up. He had been famous for neat and concentrated, and also sometimes for sharp language in old times, and he was pleased to find that the old trick was not lost with so much else, and came out. The County were charmed with the vivacity and cleverness of this mysterious man, who had held them all at bay so long.

The classical boys came first of all, and when they were done the commercial boys. Then the winners of French prizes, named by M. Leroy ; then the German, named by M. Meyer ; and then the Italian.

Silcote, rising, once more said, " We have now only to ask Signor Frangipanni to name the winners of prizes in his class, and then we will proceed to the prize of the day, and conclude the proceedings." He did not sit down again ; he looked right and left steadily, for he could not make out where Signor Frangipanni was sitting, and he had a deep eagerness to see him. He would have liked to watch Sir Godfrey Mallory also, but that was impossible.

The noble-looking Italian advanced into the middle of the hall as the others had done, and he and Silcote looked steadily at one another without anything more than a formal bow. An interest, intense even now, and soon to grow more intense still, was arising in the hearts of Englishmen about Italian men and Italian things. And the Count knew it, and coming once more into public after ten years, felt that he was showing this knot of English country gentlemen what an Italian and a conspirator could be like.

He was not among an audience very keen on the object which was nearest to his heart, perhaps ; but the country gentlemen knew a gentleman when they saw one, and the ladies were tolerably good judges of perfect dignity and perfect grace ; and as the Americans say, were “excited along of him.” That splendid-looking, grizzle-headed man, so tall, so grand, so upright, had experiences of which they could know nothing. He had been imprisoned, had escaped, had been hunted and proscribed ; had been through every kind of misery and danger for his cause, and had come out with a pure and unstained name. It was impossible not to admire him. A buzz went round the hall, so loud as to give a pause to the proceedings, as the better informed told the less informed about him. “Frangipanni, the decemvir—escape from Spandau—cut his way out of Rome in command of Garibaldi’s rearguard ;”—the actions of Garibaldi, Saffi, Mazzini, Manin, and a dozen others, were rapidly placed to his credit, as rapidly as they could be remembered. The impulsive English found themselves in possession of the desire of their hearts, a hero, and he a Count of a great name, and buzzed so loudly, that Count Frangipanni could not be heard.

At this point Arthur the unaccountable, without moving from the chair in which he sat by his father, with a somewhat cynical smile on his very pale young face, outraged the decency of a head-master by crying out suddenly and sharply, "Vive Garibaldi!" A cheer went ringing round the hall directly. Tories as they mostly were, they had a cheer for the purity and valour of that one man.

Frangipanni flushed up to the roots of his hair, but stood stately and immovable, only bowing once; when the noise had subsided they heard his voice—clear, strong, and melodious, nearly without accent. He passed over the late little demonstration without notice.

"My class has been small, sir, but I have been diligent with it. Continual diligence in politics begets diligence in every day matters, and diligence in the master makes diligence in the pupil. My class of five would get prizes, all of them, elsewhere; but I must select. I name Reginald Silcote as gainer of the prize, and James Sugden as *proximè*."

The gratified Squire delivered the prize in this instance in silence; and Arthur, walking swiftly down to

Count Frangipanni, talked eagerly with him for a few minutes, and then, having put a paper into his hand, walked back to his chair, leaving Frangipanni still standing in the centre of the hall. They all wondered why until he spoke.

"Our good head-master," he said, in his graceful, dignified way, "has put a labour of love upon me, which I am proud to discharge, however unfit. He says it is as a parting compliment to me, but what compliment have I earned in so short a time? It cannot be that he trusts this honour to a poor exile because there are some so ignoble and so wretched here as to doubt the nobility, the purity, and the excellency of his character. That he is unpopular? No! That is impossible. I will not believe that. It is not in England that perfect justice and kindness should not be appreciated. It is because I go from England into the dark south cloud, to death or prison, that he gives me this pleasant commission; that is all. I will to my duty, then.

"There has been a prize established here, ladies and gentlemen, on these grounds. The whole school are to elect by ballot the boy who has made himself most

répandu, most popular, during the year, and to send his name to the head-master for approval. They have done so, and the head-master has enthusiastically approved of their choice. The name of the boy they have chosen is my friend James Sugden."

Three heads went down : the Squire's for one instant ; then James's, who had been a little idle, and had got beyond the region of prizes, and was utterly unprepared for this ; and, lastly, his mother's, sitting calmly in a distant corner of the hall unobserved, and her head remained down longest.

James was brought forward to receive his prize, and, the proceedings being as good as over, the boys broke loose and swarmed around him : and from his old and well-trying comrades, down to the very latest comer, there were none who had not kind actions and kind words of his to thank him for now and to remember hereafter. It was a glorious triumph,—such a triumph as never comes twice in a lifetime except to statesmen with long dulled enthusiasm, and more or less carefully-guarded passions. *They* may get hysterically glad in great successes, but they can't be boys again. *Joy* is the inseparable accident of youth. We can be *glad* no longer.

They all crowded out of the hall together towards the cloisters ; the county folks, the masters, the boys—every one. James was congratulated on all sides, and having been utterly *tête montée* all day was now considerably upset. In the midst of the crowd he found himself alongside of the matron, his mother—to him only his friend Mrs. Morgan, who was calmly steering her way through them all, with her grey head bare, and her grey shawl drooping from her splendid throat over her handsome shoulders ; he clutched her arm and, looking innocently into her quiet eyes, said, passionately—

“I wish my mother could see me now ! I have been thinking so much of her lately. Oh, I wish to God she could see me now ! I shall never be so worthy of her again.”

And she bent forward in the midst of them all, and kissed him three times on his forehead, and said, “Wait ! wait ! I cannot tell you why, but wait !”

CHAPTER XV.

A HAPPY MEETING.

I THINK it very likely that, if there had been any liquor-shops close to St. Mary's, James, in the full flush of his excitement on this last and most triumphant day at the old place, would have got easily tipsy. But he had no opportunity, and certainly no inclination. He knew nothing of the effects of stimulants more than any other St. Mary's lad. There were legends among the oldsters of boys having got drunk in the old times, when the college was in town, but those legends were now very old indeed, and the only creed among the boys about drinking was that it was a manly and gentlemanly habit, from which they were unfortunately debarred. The lad, therefore, tired with pleasure and excitement, rendered himself, in a

pleasantly weary frame of mind, to his mother's room about half-past nine, and found her more busy than usual among her maids, giving all kinds of careful directions, apparently with a view to her departure.

He had time to gather this much before she spoke to him. She only smiled at him when he first came in, and asked him by her eyes to stay. After a little time she said to the maids, "I think everything is in perfect train, now. See that I find it so on my return; I shall not be long. Work as if I was looking on at you—firstly, because it is your duty; and secondly, because I shall demand an inexorable account from you when I come back. Those are no workers, to my taste, who can only work under the master's eye.—My dear James, you are, of all people in the world, the one I wished to see most."

It was the first time she had ever called him by his Christian name; he wondered why, and she herself could not have told him at that time. She was still undecided whether she would reveal herself to him or not.

"James," she said, when the maids were gone, "you go to Silcotes to-morrow? How?"

"I shall walk, Mrs. Morgan. I came to say good-bye. I can't exactly begin——"

"Then don't begin. That is perfectly easy, is it not? I also am going to Silcotes; I also am going to walk. I want you, if you will do so much for an old woman, to let me walk with you, and to show me the way. Will you do this for me? I walk fast and far, and must be back quickly, for my good maidens are, with all their good intentions, but disjointed limbs without their head. Will you undertake the old woman?"

"Undertake you!" said James. "Why, I'll wheel you there in a Bath-chair, if you like. But it is nonsense. I tell you you will never get there on foot. I make a bee line of it, and it is three-and-twenty miles."

"Three-and-twenty fiddlesticks, boy. No distance at all. Will you show me the way?"

"I should like to, better than I can tell. Do you think you can manage it?"

"I will walk as fast as you will, and as far. Go to bed, your head is hot; to-morrow morning at ten, then, at the south end of the cloisters."

The south end of the cloisters was close to the great gate, and was the place at which people generally waited before departure. James, his uniform now cast off for ever, was early there ; he was, in fact, the very first arrival.

But he was not long alone ; he was joined by Reginald, now a pale-faced youth of some eighteen years, with a weak and small, but very pretty and gentle face. He, too, had finished his academical career the night before, and had left the dormitory, and had slept at his father's, and so James had not seen him since the last evening. James saw that he was vexed at something, and asked him what it was. The relations between them hitherto were merely those of a boy with character and boldness acting on one without either, overlaid with a strong boyish affection ; relations scarcely worth noticing until now. James asked him, confidentially, what was the matter.

"Queen Elizabeth was a Tartar, I expect," said Reginald. "Don't you think she was?"

"What the deuce do I care? She had the tongue of her family, and lashed out at times ; but she is dead, you know."

"Ah! but Anne ain't dead though, and she has got the tongue of *her* family, too. I'll back the Silcote tongue against the Tudor any day of the week. And I have been having a taste of it this morning."

"You generally seem to be getting a taste of it, Reg, as far as I see. Why don't you give her as good as she brings? *You* have got the Silcote tongue, too, haven't you? Why don't you pitch into her?"

"Because I can't. She stabs me with a dagger, while I lose my temper, and make blind hits at her with a cudgel. She makes me lose temper, and consequently judgment, in a moment. *She* never loses her temper."

"Loses it? No, I should think not. It is too visible a thing to be lost. Why, Reg, there is nothing about her but her temper, except her beauty. She won't lose her beauty till she is old, and her temper is far too *pronounced* to be lost, or even mislaid for long. Its a shrewish temper, and she is a shrew. Why the dickens do you bother yourself with her?"

"Just hear what she said to me at my own father's breakfast-table this morning."

"What is the good?" said the gentle James. "What on earth is the good? She has irritated you this morning: is that any reason why you should irritate yourself all over again? Besides, here she comes herself, and will, if I know her, let us know all that has past. Let be."

Anne's horse and groom had been sent over from Silcotes, and she was to ride back. She came quickly towards them down the cloister, in her grey riding-habit, with the long skirt of it caught over one hand, and her whip in the other. A trim, pretty, doll-like little figure, with a very pretty small-featured face, terribly hard set about the mouth, and nearly as narrow, from eye to eye, as her own grandfather's, "the impersonation of Silcotism," as Miss Raylock once called him.

Her greeting had all the suspicion and all the abruptness of that remarkable family, or, to be more correct, of all the members of that family whom Miss Raylock set down as "true Silcotes." She never said "Good morning," or anything of that sort, but she went up to James, and said,

"So he has been telling you *his* story, then?"

"All right," said the perfectly placid James. "Now you turn to, and tell us yours."

"I knew he would," said Anne. "I was perfectly sure that he would take the opportunity of my putting on my riding-habit, to take his story to you. I *knew* that."

"Well, but you see," said James, "that he hasn't done anything of the sort. Now let us have *your* story to begin with. I know nothing of his. Why on earth do you two squabble and fight so? What is the matter this time? Was not there bread and butter enough for the pair of you?"

Anne tossed her head, and turned away. If James could have seen her face, he would have known, boy as he was in reality, that for the moment she hated him, while she loved him.

To more pleasant matters. Old Algernon joined them. He looked very grey, very gentle, and very good, and he came to James—

"You will make a success if you do as well in the world as you have done here"—and gave him good advice.

James, though not in the least inclined for goody

talk on that particular morning, as little inclined as are my readers, listened to it respectfully, but was relieved by the arrival of Arthur, who at least changed the conversation, though possibly turned it into a less agreeable channel. Probably he has been called "prig" too often in these pages; he was more than that. Everything he did was done with a will, using generally a miserly minimum of means towards the largest maximum of end. He did exactly the same with his money, and so, in these times, he stands out as a consistent and virtuous character. He was niggardly and cautious with his money, though he had protested against his brother Tom's disinheritance. He was niggardly and cautious in his sympathy with the boys under his charge, because he hated the idea of discounting, in the very smallest degree, his prestige as head-master; of abating one jot of the newly-gained power among two hundred boys. A power which was the dearer to his heart, because it was more absolute, and more easily and more visibly exercised, than any power he had possessed before; it was a greater power than his old power as proctor of Oxford, and he loved it proportionately more. The man had power, force,

will, call it what you like, and he loved it. He hoarded his money, because he saw that his brother Thomas had lost power by spending *his*; he utilized the power which his conduct towards that brother had given him in the eyes of his father, because he wished to discount his generosity in the form of power over his father; and he was cold and unsympathetic with his boys, because it was his nature, and his nature had been doubly confirmed in him by a course of unpopular Oxford donnery.

He was not fond of James. James was just now a mere genial idle being, who had stayed too long at school, had got to the top of it, and, not having a University career before him, had become perhaps idle, certainly popular. Arthur did not like popular boys; he himself, the salt of the earth, had been always eminently unpopular. He had an objection to popular boys. There was one gliding out of his clutches, though still in his cloisters, and he let him know it. Besides, he was still desperately angry about Miss Lee.

"Well boy," he began. "And so my father has consented to send you to Italy to study art. Goodness

knows you need it. But you will make a mess of it; you haven't got either brains or genius. The only reason I see for his decision is that you *may* be fit for it, and that you are certainly fit for nothing else. I saw one gleam of genius in you once, in a caricature of me, but it was evanescent. I would have pressed on him sending you to the University, but I didn't think you were worth the trouble and expense."

James was out of his power, and had no idea of his relationship to him; and he had a shrewd tongue, and could possibly have given him as good as he brought. But he did not. When Arthur had done with his bitter hard words, he went quietly up to him, took his hand and said,

"Before we part I have got to thank you for all your kindness and care for me since you have been here. You know as well as myself how utterly undeserving I have been of it. I wish to tell you, sir, that my faults have only been due to a natural boisterousness which I will try to correct" (he looked *very* like it, he looked a *very* likely person to "correct boisterousness;" but the lad was in earnest, and must

not, if possible, be laughed at). "I want very much, sir, before we part, to impress on you the fact that you have won my entire esteem and respect. And I'll tell you something more, sir. The other fellows don't like you, but they trust you."

Arthur flushed up scarlet; he was outdone in generosity by a boy he had thought to worry into impertinence. The "gentleman" burst out of him instantly. "You are a noble fellow, sir. If you turn chimney-sweep or scavenger you will be a gentleman still. I ask your pardon for having misconceived you. My health is very bad, and my life is extremely uncertain. With my health my temper suffers: I will try to correct it. I should have wished a different career for you, but for such a noble nature as yours I have no anxiety. Your future will be turbulent and wild, but try to keep by the old faith: as I draw nearer death I only love it more. Write to me from Italy."

"Italy, and again Italy," said Count Frangipanni's voice behind them; "and they all talk of Italy now. And I come to make my *congé* to the best of all headmasters, and I wait and wait long time till my head-

master has done walking up and down the cloister with his hand on the shoulder of my pupil; my Sugden. And I hear the word Italy, and that gives excuse to break my manners, and to make *congé*. For the train will wait at Basingstoke, but not for me. And from Basingstoke the iron lines go southward. Whither? Into thunder-cloud, into darkness, into blood, into fury and madness; into calm, peaceful, everlasting sunshine. And I must go."

"What, you are at it again you folks, are you?" said Arthur, in a tone which was decidedly not sympathetic with the cause of Italian freedom, though he had the day before called out "Viva Garibaldi!" in one of his unaccountable moods. "You are at it again, are you? after '48 too. Well, 'he who will to Cupar maun to Cupar.' The Tuscans won't go with you, they are too well governed; and, if you hope anything from the Sardinian monarchy, you are madder than I take you for. And, on your very first movement, France will be over the Alps on you, in anticipation of Austria; and there will be a fight between Austria and France over your carcase, and Austria will win one great battle, and after that will

consent to annex Piedmont, giving France Savoy, Nice, and Tuscany, and consenting to a joint protectorate over the rest of Northern Italy. You had better leave it alone and stay here."

To which remarks Count Frangipanni bowed his head three times solemnly, and in perfect silence, not trusting himself to express his wonder in words, made his *congé* to the head-master, and backed away over Mr. Betts, who said,—

"Now then, Count! I have not done anything against Italian liberty to deserve having my foot trod on like that. Do you know that Kriegsthurm has hooked it?"

"That Kriegsthurm has hooked it?" said the Count. "I am at a little loss to fathom the meaning of what you say. Hook it?"

"Ah! hooked it, Count. But lor, it's no use talking slang to a gentleman like you. Cut away, do you understand? Hopped his twig; sloped; mizzled it; made his lucky; you understand *that?*"

The Count shook his head? and went away in the direction of James.

Betts stayed with Arthur and Algernon. "There's

some sort of a game up among 'em," he said, "and I can't get to the bottom of it. They are all going south, into the very country where their heads ain't worth twopence a dozen. Your aunt's gone, you know, but she'd go anywhere where there was confusion. She ought to have been christened 'Confusion Silcote,' only the same name would be equally applicable to every member of the family I have ever seen—present company excepted, of course. And Boginsky, he's going, but he'd go anywhere for the sake of mere confusion for its own sake. Old Frangipanni is going, which looks queer; and old Mother Raylock is going; she *may* be in Short's Gardens with her tea-parties and her flowers, and may want to get materials for another novel in her old age. I can account for all of them. But what utterly upsets and shuts me up is this. They are all going, but old Kriegsthurm is *gone*, and took a hundred pounds of mine with him. He never went in '48; he stayed. There's a game up, sir, and my opinion of it is, the Lord help the Pope—Mrs. Morgan, my dear madam, I wish you a good day and a pleasant journey. Be back as soon as you can, for we shall never get on without you now."

She had joined the group while they had been talking, and now, after bowing and smiling round, beckoned James that she was ready. She wore her usual grey clothes, a little prepared for walking, the only addition to her costume being a close grey hood. She started, accompanied by James, at once after a few words of farewell, and those who were left saw the strange pair walk swiftly away together. They saw them skirt the lake, and lost them at the edge of the wood; then they saw them top the highest summit of the moorland, and disappear against the sky.

They had a great pleasure in one, another's society, and, although the way was long, and the road rough with frost and snow, it seemed short and cheerful. They talked about many things, she pointing out to him the chances, the dangers, and the glories of his future career as an artist, from time to time, so that he was never bored with her serious talk, but only excited and elevated. Then they talked of the crops, and the soil, and the poor, until, after twenty miles, the lanes began to rise and grow rougher, and Boisey held his beech-crowned head, now delicately silvered with snow, close above them in their path.

"Tired, my dear?" she asked.

"I tired! But how about you? What a splendid walker you are!"

"I have been used to it all my life. I used to walk twenty miles into Exeter at one time. And I walked that road once too often."

"Did you have an accident?"

"An accident? Yes."

"It has not crippled you. You walk strong and free."

"I had need. I have a long journey before me, and many things to do by the way; and time gets short."

"In which direction does your way lead you?"

"That I cannot tell you; I have hardly any idea. It depends entirely on a few people whose wills have always been as unsettled as the sea. You are one of those people. Learn, therefore, to be strong. Take any line you like, but hold to it; and leave me no more of these tangled skeins to set right."

"But what is your destination in this journey of yours?"

"My destination is the same as your own,—the

grave. I have a life to live out, and I am going to try to put certain things right before I die. What things, I scarcely know. How, I do not see. I believe that I may require your assistance. I may or I may not. I cannot see my way as yet. If I require, if I *command*, your assistance, let me find no whimpering, sentimental boy, but a self-possessed, cool-headed man. You are gentle and loveable; I want more than that. I may want you to show your mettle on emergency. Not in fisticuffs, or any rubbish of that sort, but in hard intellectual pluck. There is mischief coming, there is death coming. I have dreamt of fallen angels, still wearing their white garments, being hurled over a high precipice into a deep unfathomable pool of black water by thousands. I know one who wears white still. Never wear white, boy, it shows the bloodstains so openly; whether the blood be Polish, Hungarian, or Italian, it shows all the same. Here is the old short cut, through this gap, you forgetful boy. Turnips this year again: how is that? God help me! my memory must not go yet. Turnips! I must be a year wrong. Wheat, barley, clover, is three, and

turnips, wheat, barley, and clover, is four, which is seven. Quite right. And turnips again is eight. And you are turned nineteen, which makes it quite right. Don't you see?"

James did not see at all; but he said, "I will go with you through thick and thin. But I cannot understand what you are speaking about——"

"I hardly understand myself," she interrupted. "You will probably know more in less than half an hour. But I can say nothing even about that. Don't brush your feet through the turnips like that; lift them over. If you cut away the heart of the turnip with your boots, the frost will get in and destroy the turnip, and if the turnip is destroyed the farmer will suffer; and if the farmer suffers the labourer will suffer more. For the farmer having no margin, but living from hand to mouth, but feeling the dread, horror, and disgrace of bankruptcy always before him, oppresses the labourer who is undegradable, being in a chronic state of bankruptcy. They used to say that taxes ultimately fall on the producer. They have altered that now, I believe. But remember when—I mean if ever—you come into any property, that every pound spent in luxury repre-

sents a loss of seven shillings and sixpence to the wealth of the nation. Look there—there is old Avery, creeping out in the sun. He don't look a bit older. Did ever anybody see the like of that?"

She had totally puzzled James. He could not make anything of her. I hope the reader is only puzzled by her political economy.

"We turn off here," said James.

"The lane is better walking," she answered.

"You have been here before, and you know the people, too," said James, as though he had made a brilliant discovery.

And she said, "Wait. It is inconceivable to me that mere absence should have dulled memory to this extent. Let us see. After all it is a mere psychological question. It does not touch one's heart, or the sentimental part of one, in the least."

In the muddiest part of the muddiest lane, James, in a state of puzzled and wondering submission, stopped her in her rapid walk for a moment.

"I lived here once," he said, and pointed to the old cottage.

She turned, and looked him full and steadily in the

face, for her mind was made up now. There was to be no more deceit in her life. She looked him straightly steadily in the face, and merely said, "You lived here once? Does the sight of the old place bring up no memories? Do you remember your mother?"

Not in the least. He looked her straight in the face and answered, "No."

The door was ready for unlocking, but the key was still a quarter of a mile away.

Wending on through the woodlands they came to a part of them where nature began to be slightly assisted by art; laurels and laurustinus began to appear, and, after the first wire fence was passed, the signs of order grew more and more visible, until the scarcely marked roadway grew into a gravel-drive, and, joining another and a larger one, which formed the main approach to the house, came to an end.

She walked steadily on in silence through the glades of the densely-timbered deer park, catching glimpses from time to time of the crowded and deep red chimneys and gables of Silcotes. When they were before the porch she spoke again.

" I wonder whether the bloodhounds are loose ? "

" You are perfectly safe with me," he answered, still in wonder ; and they passed into the old hall.

Here were the dogs grouped round the fire—standing, sitting, and lying, blinking their foolish soft eyes at it. And in the centre of them sat a man of great stature, who was bending thoughtfully over the blaze, with his feet upon the stone hearth on either side of it.

A soldier, as it seemed to James, for he wore the high military collar, and had some sort of silver accoutrements on his back. The dogs seemed fond of him, and one had leaned its great head against his knee.

A slight movement among the dogs, in consequence of their recognising James, caused this man to look round and rise. When James had finished caressing the only one of the lazy animals which had come to meet him, he looked at the man again. He was a soldier of some sort, and was of great height, James saw, and then he suddenly gasped for breath and twitched his arms. His mother stood perfectly silent ; looking eagerly on.

It was a strange thing, but he knew his uncle, when he had been quite unable to recognise his mother. James

Sugden's face (it was he who stood before James in the dress of a commissionnaire) had changed but little in his Crimean campaign; and his mother's had changed so much,—not only in appearance, but in expression. As for Sugden, he was the great, peaceful, placid, affectionate giant he had ever been. James, in a startled voice called him by his old title, and, as he saw the old quiet smile come into his face, he dashed forwards with a shout, and had him by both arms.

"Is mother here?" was his first eager question, when he had looked for half a minute on the dear old face. "Have you brought her?"

"Yes! here she is, old man," said Sugden, turning towards her. James saw no one but Mrs. Morgan, and trembled in every limb. Sugden went and kissed her, and when he saw the two faces together he knew her, and such a rush of emotion, of wonder, of joy, of regret, came on him at once, as could only find expression in a wild, delighted cry.

Hour after hour passed on, and not a servant came near the hall; Silcote had provided against that. Only very distant sounds came feebly on the ear; the

bloodhounds slumbered quietly around them ; a deep unutterable peace filled the souls of these three so long separated, so happily united, as they sat hand in hand talking in a low and gentle voice before the fire.

CHAPTER XVI.

WE GET THE ASSISTANCE OF A CHORUS.

IT is a common accusation against the English abroad that they herd too much together, and, until they are very well used to it, will avoid the best foreign companionship and society for the sake of a third-class compatriot. It is, no doubt, somewhat true; and it would certainly have seemed true, and been put down as an inseparable accident of the English nation, had M. Assollant happened to be at a certain great ball given at the Russian Embassy at Vienna in the very early spring of 1859.

It was a rather awkward time for every one; for, after the French Emperor's too celebrated "regrets" on New Year's day, which have now become so celebrated as to be a little of a bore, things had been going on from bad

to worse. And although Lord Cowley had arrived in Vienna to undertake the somewhat hopeless task of persuading two persons to make peace, both of whom were bent on fighting, it was a more awkward time for the English at Vienna than usual, for it was notorious that three quarters of the nation had Italian sympathies, and consequently in the coming struggle wished Austria well certainly, but wished Italy better. The French also were extremely unpopular with the English that year, so that really our poor countrymen had not a very pleasant time of it in the Austrian capital, having a strong disinclination to speak to any one they met ; and were more than ever inclined to get together. Of course I am only speaking of the rank and file, of the quiet and non-political travellers or residents.

Such quiet people found themselves perfectly comfortable and safe in the society of two people well known as English, and also as sound Austrians ; one of the smaller rooms in which these two people had established themselves, seemed to have almost the appearance of an English court, of which they were the king and queen.

They were standing, and very close together. The

man was a magnificent giant of a man, a little over forty, with a head of jet black curls, in a white Austrian uniform, rather highly ornamented, with blue tights, which set off his handsome leg to perfection, and boots, fitting also close to his leg, and barely reaching to his calf: a splendid figure, but not such a splendid figure as that of the woman who stood behind him, and whose dress relieved his own so well,—a tall, extremely handsome woman, older than he, but very like him, dressed in a sweeping robe of ruby velvet, and wearing on her breast a large stomacher of opals. About her neck—as round and as well moulded as the youngest girl's in the room—she had a collar of pearls, and so stood for admiration, which she certainly got, with one well-formed arm hanging loosely upon her velvet, and the other passing affectionately behind her companion, and resting on the cornice behind him.

“Who were they?” some outsiders and foreigners asked, attracted by the sumptuous grace and beauty of the pair who seemed so sought after as their countrymen all of a sudden. “The Princess of Castelnuovo, and her nephew Colonel Silcote, of the Austrian service. Her late husband was an Italian rene—a thousand

pardons." "And who is that exquisitely pretty little English girl, in light blue satin, who seems to be under the protection of Madame the Princess?" "That is the niece of the Princess, Miss Silcote of Silcotes, the great heiress." To such effect spoke the foreigners. The English conversation of three gentlemen ran somewhat in this way.

These three men had got into a corner together accidentally; and were three rather remarkable-looking men, though quite young. The tallest of the three was a rather pale man, with dark hair and very prominent features; the next in height was pale also, but very handsome. Both of these men looked some ten years older than they were, and spoke in a low and deliberate voice, like men who had been in some way tamed. The third of the group, who always touched the second, was stone blind. The first man was Charles Ravenshoe, the second Austin Elliot, and the third Lord Edward Barty. Charles Ravenshoe had met the other two here, and they were talking together of many things, and lastly of the Princess and her nephew.

"Who are these people, Ravenshoe?" said Austin Elliot, with a ghost of his bright old smile, "and why

are they holding a court within a court like this? What the dickens are we doing in this room? Why are *you* here, sir? Eh?"

"Why are you?" said Charles, laughing. "For much the same reason as the rest of us. Because we feel guilty on the subject of politics, and wish to have the countenance of two celebrated Austrian sympathisers."

"Well, I suppose so. But, once more, who are these people?"

Lord Edward interposed. "They are most remarkable people. I wish I could see the woman."

"Why?" asked Charles Ravenshoe.

"Because she is a wonderful woman. I have been listening to her conversation, and there is an inconsecutive vacuous fatuity about it which has both astonished and interested me. What powers of lying that woman must have, with that false unmarked voice, and that false laugh! The woman laughs carefully in fifts. Don't she show her teeth when she laughs? And are they not fine teeth?"

They said, "Yes."

"A good guess for a man who has never looked on

the light of heaven. Let me try another. She has either made mischief or will make it,—inconceivable mischief. Yet I should get to like her if I knew her. I think I should have guessed that her appearance was splendid even if I had not heard every one saying so around me. What is she like, Austin? You know what I mean, though I never could get music into your head."

"Like a solemn anthem of Purcell or Boyce."

"Tut! Tut! Like 'Pop goes the Weasel.' Charles Ravenshoe's wife would have made a better hit than that. False music there, but a kind woman. A little cracked melody, and no harmony."

"What do you think of the man?" asked Austin Elliot, looking at Charles Ravenshoe.

"Marseillais," answered Lord Edward, shortly. "Knows how to die, but don't know how to live. Who is this little girl who is talking with them, evidently chaperoned by the Princess? A little girl, pretty I hear them say; weasel-faced, as I should guess, with a soprano voice. Might sing up to C in alto if her voice lasted, which it won't. Who is she?"

"The Princess's niece. The great heiress, Miss Silcote."

"Heaven help her husband," said the blind man.

"What a fine mess she and her aunt will make with some one before they have done. Austin! Austin! where are you? I cannot feel you in the dark, and something evil is touching me."

Austin Elliot caught him by the arm at once, and apologised to a square-faced, powerfully-built gentleman in a court dress, who had accidentally touched Lord Edward's elbow. "Monsieur," he exclaimed in French, "was blind, and was apt to be nervous at the touch of a stranger."

Lord Edward Barty struck in at once in the same language. "Monsieur is not nervous. But Monsieur knows many more things than people who have their sight."

The courteous stranger passed to the rear of them, and Austin Elliot took Lord Edward Barty to task.

"My dear Edward, you were very rude to that man."

"I don't care," said Lord Edward. "I won't have *canaille* come near me. I live among and love working folks, but I will have no *canaille* about me."

"But how can you tell that he was of the *canaille*?"

"By his touch, you blind man, if by nothing else. By his apologetic shuffling touch: but you cannot understand that. Then by his *smell*; perhaps you can understand *that*."

"My dear Edward, you carry your fancies too far. Your beloved working-men don't smell too sweet on the one hand; and, speaking of your own order, the generation before yours seldom washed themselves."

"I don't care," said Lord Edward. "I only assert that never since the Norman Conquest has any honest English nobleman, or honest English workman, contrived to smell of stale tobacco-smoke, brandy, and patchouli as that man did. But his touch, which you blind folks cannot in your darkness appreciate, was far worse than his smell. Austin, you can tell Ravenshoe that I do not romance about my powers of touch. Now let us hear more of this wonderful pair, who seem, from the conversation I have heard, to be Juno and St. Michael at least."

"I can tell you all about them, except what I don't know," said Charles Ravenshoe; "they live close to

my friend Hainault's place at Casterton. To begin with, they are all as mad as hatters."

"You begin to get interesting already," said Austin Elliot.

"Everybody knows everything about these Silcotes," continued Charles Ravenshoe; "but they have erected a theory in their family, that nobody does; or, if forced to allow that any one knows anything, that it is like his impudence. Old Silcote, the Squire of Silcotes, is an absolute and preposterous old Bedlamite, who ought to have been in Littlemoor long ago, but he has an excuse for being mad. His wife was going on in a sad manner in Italy, and he went and fetched her back; and, after he got her home, she tried to poison him, and he found it out. She died—about the best thing she could do; and he went mad—possibly a good thing for him. That Princess there, in the ruby velvet and opals, is his sister, the most transcendent fool in all Europe. She married a Prince Massimo of Castelnovo, who, in 1848, not only turned traitor in the most rascally manner to the Italian cause, but went off with the young wife of one Count Aurelio Frangipanni, whom I know, and who, take him all

in all, is one of the most perfect people in the world. That Princess there and her young husband lived a cat-and-dog life together over this business, until he died; after which she sainted him, kept in mourning for him, spooned over him, and spoons over him to this day. She is a fearful humbug that woman. Well, in consequence of this attempted poisoning business, and possibly other things, old Silcote refused to recognise her son, now developed into a Puseyite parson, and put that curly-pated, empty-headed bully, Colonel Silcote, on the throne of the Silcotes. But the curly-headed bully would not do. He was allowed a thousand a year and spent six. He owed ten thousand pounds, and would only confess to three. He was asked to leave the women alone, and he promised that he would, and bolted with a ballet-dancer the week after. He would not do at any rate whatever; the more so as it was perfectly evident that he had contracted a marriage which was binding on him, and, rascal as he was, that he was not inclined to incur any of the penalties for bigamy.

“ Old Silcote now put the Silcote crown on the head of the second son by his second wife, who,

as I am informed by Miss Raylock, refused it with scorn. If that is the case," said Charles Ravenshoe, "it is the only good I ever heard of him. He is an utterly narrow-minded prig, of the worst Oxford model."

"The stamp of man who rusticated you, for instance," said Austin Elliot.

"Your remark," said Charles Ravenshoe, "is not only coarse and impertinent, but also falls wide of the mark. I am trying to enlarge your little mind, narrowed into smaller limits than even its natural ones, by your worship of this new gospel of Free Trade and Cobdenism. You interrupt me with personalities. I wish to tell you about these Silcotes."

"You can't deny that you set the College on fire, and aimed fourpenny rockets at the Dean's window. It was entirely owing to your evil guidance that that quiet creature Ascot got sent down, you old sinner!" replied Austin Elliot.

"Don't chaff, you two, or at least wait till we get home," said Lord Edward. "I am bored here, and I want to hear more about these Silcotes. That Charles is an old ruffian we all know; we will get more of his

confessions out of him, and tell Eleanor if he don't go on."

"Well, then," said Charles Ravenshoe, with a broad smile telling sadly of the old Adam spreading over his features, "I will. This Miss Silcote, the pretty little girl who stands there: shall we have her over the coals? She is not *Miss* Silcote at all, but Miss Anne Silcote. The real Miss Silcote is a Dora Silcote, daughter of the Puseyite parson, who is under a cloud with his father. The real Miss Silcote is most charming, good and sensible; this Miss Anne Silcote is a vixen. They can't do anything with her at all."

"Is she the daughter of the man who rusticated you?" asked Lord Edward.

"Of Arthur, I suppose you mean. No, she is not the prig's daughter, and he had nothing to do with my rustication, which seems the only one of my good deeds which my friends appear inclined to remember. She is the daughter of another son, who died. Arthur of Balliol is not married. He tried to train a girl to suit his imperial taste, and she nearly met his views. But when, after a year or so, he had brought his powerful mind to bear on the fact that she hadn't got

any money, he pitched her overboard ; and she, on her part, cut him effectually. Immediately after which she came into eight thousand a year, and turned Papist."

" Bravo !" said Lord Edward.

" This Silcote property is actually enormous. Hainault, a very safe man, and a neighbour of Silcote's—from that reason knowing probably more of his affairs than the idiotic old Bedlamite does himself—puts it at between forty and fifty thousand a year. Now it seems very likely that a considerable number of noses will be put out of joint when he dies. His eldest son and his eldest son's children he is not likely to recognise. That bully of an Austrian colonel standing there before you has tired his patience out by his dissipation and extravagance ; Arthur of Balliol has rejected the crown, and has systematically bullied and insulted him : he has an awful tongue, this Arthur. The Oxford fellows who were——"

" Rusticated for setting the College on fire," suggested Austin Elliot.

" I shall have to do violence to this man," said Charles Ravenshoe ; " I shall have to fight a duel with this fellow."

There was such a sharp sudden spasm in Austin Elliot's face as he said this that Charles Ravenshoe hurried on, cursing inwardly his wandering tongue.

"I shall have to beat this Elliot here, you know, Lord Edward, or tell his wife about his impudence, or something of that sort: I know I shall. I resume the conversation where he so impertinently interrupted it. This Silcote of Balliol has an inexorably cruel tongue; *I* know something of what a don's tongue may get to by constant practice. I ought to, if any man ever did. It was said of me once that I went into Collections in my usual health, and came out looking ten years older, and so grey, that I had to send to Spiers for hair-dye. There was a nucleus of truth in that, though a small one. But they say that there was never such a tongue as his. And old Ray—I mean my informant—says that he has used his tongue on his father so long, that the old fool has shown some glimmerings of reason, and got sick of it. So that the money won't go in *that* direction. We perfectly well know, however, in which direction it will go. The old fellow, having nothing to do except to swear at his grooms and thrash his dogs, found a

new amusement. There was a certain old school in London, St. Mary's Hospital, and he, as a governor of it, taking up with Arthur's 'Young Oxford' notions, got it moved into the country, and made a bankrupt old blackguard, one Betts, treasurer of it, Arthur headmaster, and went so far in his iniquitous jobbery as to make his disowned son, Algernon, second master, as a cheap provision for him. And now what has he done to crown all? Why, picked out the brightest and best-looking of the boys in that school and made him his heir."

I suppose that this is the sort of account which will be given of *your* affairs, my dear reader, even in the hands of such a kind and gentle being as Charles Ravenshoe, if you persistently decline to face the world, and make ridiculous mysteries about them, as did Silcote. And I only hope that you may get off so easily, but I doubt it.

A Frenchman had been standing close to Lord Edward Barty all this time, and actually touching him, but Lord Edward had not objected either to his touch or his smell. He was known to both Ravenshoe and Elliot familiarly, and when Charles Ravenshoe had done he nodded his head three times, and said—

"These histories of families are very charming, but, I think, dull. The history of my own family would be very interesting, but also, I fear, dull; save in those portions of it which concern myself. I have listened attentively to my friend Ravenshoe. I understand English perfectly, and have gathered only the idea that the Princess of Castelnuovo yonder was concerned in the poisoning of Ravenshoe's aunt, and that his grandfather had left his whole estate to a boy from the Lycée. These family histories are only tolerable and interesting in novels. I came in here because I was tired of the continual *hauteur* of the Austrians, whom we are shortly going to tie up in a bag and send northward; and since I have been in here I have seen more, than you, my Ravenshoe."

"What have you seen?"

"While you have been talking of this Princess, of the bread and butter she ate as a child, of the milk and water she slopped on the floor in her early youth, I have been watching her face. And she has seen the devil."

"By Jove, she looks as if she had," said Charles.

"Can you tell," said the Frenchman in a whisper,

"the direction of eyes? While you were telling your stupid old story I was watching her eyes, and I saw that she saw the devil. Now in this corner, now in that. Which way are her eyes now?"

"Why, they are straight towards us."

"Then the devil must be close behind us, unless *we* are the devil, a theory which will not stand argument. Thou art no devil, my old foolish Balaclava dragoon, and I am only a devil among the ladies; not in practice, it is only a tradition of your nation about ours. Turn, then, and look at the devil behind us, who has so paled the Princess in the ruby velvet and opals. What makes your blind friend impatient? But there is a smell as of a billiard-marker."

Charles and the Frenchman turned together. Behind them was the square-set gentleman in the English court dress before noticed. The Frenchman laughed and said, "Hah! my friend, art thou this side of the wall, then, this time? Don't cross the centre of the bridge of Buffalora; the arch has given way somewhat, and the bridge might give way, and you might fall in the water. Strike out for the west side if you do. There are Italians, and may be other *canaille*, on the other side.

And how do you find *your* trade, my friend? It is a trade which always has paid somehow; and you look sleek enough."

The stout man seemed not over pleased at the recognition, and smiled constrainedly. The next moment he pushed his way between them, and advanced towards the Princess. She in turn advanced rapidly towards him, so that they met together somewhat apart from the other guests; and the Princess was able hurriedly to say, "To-morrow night on the ramparts, opposite the Kaiser Franz Gasthaus," before she led him smiling up to Colonel Silcote, and reminded him of his name, which was totally unnecessary.

Tom Silcote looked on him with anything but good favour. "You are a bold bird, Kriegsthurm," he said in English. "Have you squared with the Government?"

"I am in the employ of his Imperial Majesty, colonel. But my name is Schmitz, if I might be allowed to suggest such a trifle."

"All right," said Tom Silcote. "Do you know, there being no one listening at this moment, not even my aunt, that you are, in my humble opinion, barely wise

in being here, now that you have declared yourself so very positively on our side. I wish you nothing but well, as you know, but I think you are indiscreet. I have seen faces about Vienna lately which looked sadly like the old Democratic Committee business. One word is as good as a dozen to a man like you."

"I only ask for one word. Have you seen any one you have ever seen before? Only the one word. Not another, on my honour."

"You shall have it on my honour. Yes."

Kriegsthurm still looked pleadingly in Tom Silcote's face, and Tom Silcote answered,—

"Couldn't do it, old fellow. Not even for you."

"Not the first letter, colonel?"

"No. Decency! decency! If I had intended to denounce, I should have done so. You go home early, and keep in the middle of the street. That is all the advice I can give you at present. You have made a great mistake in being here, and declaring yourself so decidedly on the Tedeschi side. You will not be safe from assassination even in London now. Remember the Waterloo Bridge business."

"One word, colonel. Have you seen more than one?"

"I am compromising myself; the English are unpopular here, and I have not done much to aid our popularity. Well, then, yes. More than one, by my observation. More than three dozen, most likely. Are you losing your brain and your nerve, that you ask me such a question? Do you not know,—you, one of the shiftiest conspirators in Europe,—that there is the nucleus of a Democratic Committee in every Hungarian regiment? You must have gone mad, old fellow, before you came here at all. Why the deuce didn't you stay in England? Where is my aunt?"

"She is talking with that long-nosed young booby, Ravenshoe. Time is precious, colonel. I came here to see how things were going, and I wish that I had stayed where I was. I have made a mistake. England is the only place for a conspirator. I say I wish I had stayed where I was. Well, so I do, for some reasons, not for others. You ask me why I came here, and I will honestly tell you: because it is the most dangerous place I could have come to. The dear old fun of conspiracy is so dear to me, that I actually broke with the democratic connexion, and with the Italian and Hungarian connexion, for the mere fun

of doing it, of coming here, and declaring for the Tedeschi."

"You will be murdered," said Tom Silcote.

"By whom?"

"By the democrats. Look at Orsini."

"He be blowed. *He* is well out of the way, and all his lot. I never encouraged *him*."

"You did not stop him as you could have done."

"In our trade we never stop any one, we only warn. I warned him, he insulted me, and called me spy; and I let him go."

"At the risk of the French Emperor's life. My dear friend, there is such a thing as morality."

"So they say," retorted Kriegsthurm. "I suppose there is. But we can't recognise it in our trade, you know."

"I suppose not," said Tom Silcote.

"A few words more, colonel," said Kriegsthurm.

"You are terribly in debt, are you not?"

"Pretty well."

"Aunt's fortune pretty near gone with it, I fear?"

"I don't know. She gives me plenty of money, and never grumbles."

"I do, though, And I'll tell you. Your aunt has not got above ten thousand pounds left in money to bless herself with; and you'll soon get through that, you know. But she loves you beyond everything in this world. You allow that?"

"Dear old girl! She does. And I love her, Master Conspirator, as dearly as she loves me."

"Does you credit," said Kriegsthurm. "When you, loving her as you do, have finished up her money, you will have to begin on her jewels. And she has sixty thousand pounds' worth of them. You are awfully fond of one another, and love one another to distraction. How long would that love last if you were to ask her to sell one of her jewels for you?"

"Kriegsthurm, you are the devil."

"Very near it, I will allow, thank you. You know your aunt, and your aunt's intellect. She loves you, but she would see you in Newgate sooner than part with a single opal or a single yard of lace. I suppose, also, that you know by this time her inexorable obstinacy. Is what I have been stating the truth or is it not?"

"Go away, Aunt. Politics!" said Tom Silcote.

And the Poor Princess, who was coming to them, went away again and talked to Lord Edward Barty, who afterwards remarked to Austin Elliot that the woman smelt well, and that in ordinary conversation her voice was by no means objectionable.

"I will allow to you," said Tom Silcote, "that all which you say about my aunt is perfectly true. Kriegsthurm, let us be plain. You are a great rascal, I fear; but you have a way of inviting confidence which I never saw equalled. I can understand your power among these Nationalists and Democrats."

Kriegsthurm laughed.

"I believe that my aunt loves me better than any human being, but yet I know that she would die of starvation, and see me die at her side, sooner than part with one of her gewgaws. Why?"

"Because she is as mad as a March hare," answered Kriegsthurm. "You Silcotes, one and all of you, have just stopped on the verge of madness, and even she has not *legally* overstepped it. There are many such families; and they are generally, I should say almost always, brilliant and successful. It has not been the case in your family, I allow, because you

seem to have arrived at that average when you are both too sane and too mad for success. All that is the matter with your aunt is, that she is the fool of the family; the maddest of the whole lot. Just look at her, will you? Look at her frantic extravagance in dress, and look at her curious investment in jewels. No one ever saw before such a quaint combination of extravagance and prudence. Of money—and, indeed, of money's worth—she knows little or nothing; but she understands jewels, and her hoarding instinct takes the form of jewels. Her human instincts take the form of sainting her late husband (as bad a rogue as me) and loving you. But she would see you in Newgate before she would sell a diamond for you, and you know it."

"Well, leave my aunt alone."

"For the present," said Kriegsthurm. "She is mad, and I have made a mint of money out of her folly. Such men as you and I, colonel, needn't mince matters together. We know too much for that. What I am driving at, as a practical man, is this. *She* will spend cash on you till it is all gone; but then?"

"I have my profession, and my position as an Austrian colonel."

"Oh, if you swells would only speak out! Just once in a way for change."

"Well, then, I confess that, if I was reduced to my pay, I should have to live closer than I should like."

"*Pre-cisely*. Now, to prove that I am more of a business man than yourself, what will you stand, if, through my instrumentality, you were installed as master of Silcotes, with forty thousand a year?"

"I think," said reckless Tom, "that I would stand a thousand a year."

"Good! That is what you would stand. Now what would you stick at—murder?"

"I should stick at murder, decidedly. In fact, if you will gather the impudence to repeat the proposition, I will kick you out of the room, as a general measure, not in the least regarding consequences. I confess myself an ass—my life has proved it; and I know you to be a great rascal—your life has proved it. And again to turn the proposition over, I am little better than a rascal, and you most assuredly are an ass, to have hinted such a thing to me."

"Who is the ass?" said Kriegsturm scornfully. "There are but two of us here talking together, and if one of us is an ass, and it is not myself. You speak to me as though I proposed murder. I did nothing of the kind. I asked you only whether you would stick at murder to gain Silcotes. Would you? I do not believe that you would. See here, colonel. I am getting old, and shall some day, when my vitality is less, get tired of the old political conspiracies. And they *lead* to nothing; at least to nothing I care about. I shall want a new sphere for my talents. If I can get you Silcotes, will you give me a thousand a year?"

"I should like Silcotes well enough," answered the colonel, "but it is beyond your power. And, after this singular escapade of yours in coming to Vienna and declaring for us, you are safe nowhere."

"I will bet you," said Kriegsturm, "that I am back in London in six months, with the full confidence of the whole National and Democratic parties in Europe, if you like, in spite of my present indiscretion and declaration. *You* don't know what fools those continental Democrats are."

"Well, walk in the middle of the street while you

are here. As for Silcotes, if you can ever show me that you got me Silcotes, you shall have your thousand a year off the rent roll. But we are going to fight; and—who knows?”

“You are going to fight, colonel, and are going to get beat. You will have had soldiering enough after this bout.”

“Going to get beat, hey,” thought Colonel Silcote. “If you ever spoke the truth in your life, you spoke it then.”

CHAPTER XVII.

THE RAMPARTS.

It was a very calm spring night, and the ramparts were very quiet. The scent which came from the fast subsiding Danube, was no longer the coarse rough smell of mud, but the oxygenated scent of fresh spring vegetation. Nature was hastening to repair the damage of her winter's ill-temper ; but certain trappings of sentries and guards more numerous than usual, and more than those, the low, growling rumble of the waggons of the military train already creeping southward, showed clearly enough, to those who had ears which could understand sounds, that man was about to begin his career of destruction as soon as nature was peaceful enough to allow him.

It was a wide rampart, from which you saw a plain,

and beyond, very quiet peaceful hills: a very quiet and peaceful wind came quietly from those hills across the river, and raised a few whispers in the trees upon the rampart. The country there is not a cruel country. Nature is more than half kind; it is only plagued by kings and dynasties. The people are a quiet, law-fearing people enough, coming of a good stock; and the land is a better land than one-half the United States or nine-tenths of Australia. But they are plagued by dynastic traditions, and so it is an uneasy land, and a land almost as ill to live in, for all its beauty, as Calabria with its constantly recurring earthquakes.

However, at this time of night the Emperor was asleep or dancing, and the gentle wind came peacefully and kindly from the hills beyond the river. It said nothing of the things which it had seen there, of the students who had defended that very place in 1849; nothing of the entrance of gaudy honest Jellachich; nothing of the midnight fusillades which followed it. It had never known, or it had forgotten. It merely wandered like a gentle hand over the face of our old friend the Princess, and said quietly, "Peace!"

And she heard it: low as her instincts were, she heard that. The world and her life had always been to her an ugly great confusion, which she felt, more by instinct than by reason, that she could not set right—a confusion of hopelessly tangled iron cordage, with here and there a single silver wire. She had always seized the end of these silver wires, and with weak hands, but with the obstinacy of a mule, had tried to unravel them from the mass of inexorable iron cordage which was too strong for her. In other words, she was a feeble, almost silly, woman who had been educated by washy Continental politicians of a certain school not entirely unrepresented in our model country, until she believed that intrigue was strength. “Leave my aunt alone,” said Colonel Silcote. Well, we will, when we have done with her. We must notice these things, however. She never knew what she was going to do next. There were two or three things in this world which she wanted done, and would fight to the death to get done. Beyond these things she had no policy whatever except this—opposition: the putting of spokes in all kinds of wheels which seemed to be turning, for fear the circle should not come round in the way in

which she wished it. Not having any intellect, and knowing it ; only wishing for a few things, and knowing that also, her policy was obstructive. She denied everything to which she did not see her way, and only admitted the facts which would serve her small purposes provisionally.

The poor fool had been a child once, and was getting oldish and childish again now. She had always been blindly striving against some things she understood, and others which she did not, but only dreaded because she could not understand. She had striven, for instance, with the utmost persistency, in the saving of her own character, and had saved it: had spent her cash (while she hoarded her jewels) for Colonel Silcote ; and had striven blindly and persistently against all strangers, and all strange ideas, lest the fact that she was the proximate cause of the ruin of her brother's life should in any way become known to her brother.

She had been always blindly restless, and now she began to want peace and oblivion—an escape from all this miserable confusion which was getting deeper confounded on her day by day. Her case was very pitiable. Thirty years or more of her life had been

framed more or less on a frightful lie, the full iniquity of which she had only learnt recently. She had spent the most of her money. Her terror of her brother's learning the truth was as strong as ever; and she desired peace—desired to escape the consequences of her own folly.

Some escape and some do not. Half-witted woman as she was, she had brains enough to see that some people, in this world at least, escape from the consequences of their own actions. She hoped she might be one of those lucky people, and she prayed for it. The Popish form of Christian faith began to have great attractions for her, as it had had for Miss Lee under very different circumstances. It promised peace, and she wanted peace. She had prestige and position as the principal Protestant lady in Vienna. But the Jesuits promised her greater things; and the Jesuits are good paymasters. They give what they promise. They give peace to fools.

She wanted peace. She had been fearfully indiscreet with Sir Godfrey Mallory, in the very old times, and she had allowed Kriegsthurm to blind her brother, of whom she was terribly afraid, by inuendos against

Silcote's own wife. I have done my business badly, if you have not understood this before. This was a terrible crime. Poor, gentle, good Mrs. Silcote would have died from this accusation alone if it had been ever made to her. But she died a perfectly puzzled woman, entirely without knowledge or suspicion of evil. She had been very carefully brought up, and the idea of unfaithfulness to her husband was one which she never could have understood. The mere suspicion of such a thing, the mere mixing up of his wife's name with that of Sir Godfrey Mallory, had made Silcote a brute. The unmentionable accusation against her, brought afterwards, had maddened him. It was inconceivable to him, as it is to us, and as it was to Mrs. Thomas, when he told her of it. But he believed it—it was so well put.

By whom? By Kriegsturm, a man who knew the art of conspiracy. The Princess had trusted the whole business to his management; he was a thoroughgoing man, and she paid him well, and he went a little beyond his instructions.

His excuse to the Princess of Castelnovo was this: that his instructions were vague, and that he had to

act on his private judgment ; that something stronger was wanted to counteract Silcote's uxoriousness to his wife than mere accusations ; that he took stronger measures.

She had always dreaded to ask him what he had done after she saw the terrible consequences of it. But a short time before, he, for the purpose of showing her how deeply they were committed together, had told her the whole wicked story, and she had fled from him in terror.

Oh that he were dead, or that she were dead ! She was a kind, a very kind, woman in her way. The distress of others was unbearable to her. And now that she had at last realized what had really been done through her means, her terror and distress were extreme. To-night, in this quiet place, for the first time since she had known everything, she had got into a softer and gentler mood. After a few turns up and down, she bent her head down upon the parapet, and wept long and bitterly.

The gentle wind blowing over the graves of the piled thousands of slain at Aspern told of peace and rest in quiet country churchyards, where the dead keep one

another solemn company through low whisperings of the summer night. How calm all those dead lay out there at Aspern, Austrian and Frenchmen!—

Her quiet and gentle meditations were interrupted, and her face grew hard, and potentially wicked again. Kriegsthurm stood beside her.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THEY MAKE ALL KINDS OF PLANS.

"CONFOUND and confuse the dogs!" (it was something worse in reality,) cried out the Squire, picking himself up from among them; "I have broken my arm."

He had not, to relieve the reader's anxiety. All that had happened was this. He had been going through an interview with his steward, stud-groom, and butler in his study, and had got into a most abominable temper with all three of them, for no earthly reason. He had left them, scolding, and had scolded so loud (gone away "hobbling and cussing," said the butler), that the bloodhounds had heard him coming, and had prepared to welcome him by standing and sniffing at the door by which they knew he would enter. Consequently Silcote, bursting into the hall in King

Cambyses' vein, tripped up over the foolishest and boldest puppy, and came headlong down among three hundred weight and three hundred pounds' worth of useless and stupid dog-flesh, and hurt his elbow. The dogs immediately licked his face; all except the junior dog, who was damaged by his fall, and boo-whooped away with his grievance into the chimney-corner.

"I wish the confounded dogs were dead," he said, raising himself up. "*They* are eating me out of house and home, and I am being swindled and cheated out of house and home. I have broken my arm, I hope. I should like to have broken my arm; it would give me prestige again. I wish I had the typhus fever; they would all come flocking back again fast enough then, to see about the will. I am perfectly certain that I am being cheated right and left by those three, but I can't prove it, and they ain't a bit afraid of me. I never should get a civil word from anybody now, even if anybody were here; but they have all run away from me. I have hurt that puppy, though. I must go and see after him. Ban! Ban! What is it, old fellow? Hang the dog, he is sneaking

away! Go to Italy, you ungrateful whelp! Lor, what an ass I have been on the whole!"

"You never said a truer word than that," said Mrs. Tom's voice at his elbow. She had heard him scolding along the passages, and was advancing to open the door for him, when he burst in and tumbled over the dogs.

"Hallo!" said he, looking somewhat foolish; "so you are there, Madam Tongue, are you!"

"Here I am, tongue and all," she replied; "with a very ugly black crow to pick with you, Squire."

"Well, go on, then, and pick it," said Silcote; "you are all against me now. Go on. Scold yourself into quiescence, like any other woman: if you scold yourself into hysterics, I'll not raise a hand to bring you out of them."

"Don't be ungentlemanlike," said Mrs. Thomas. "I don't allow it. Keep your temper for your dogs. I will have none of it."

"So *you* have turned against me, have you?"

"Yes, strongly. You have deceived me grossly. You knew perfectly well about my succession to this great property. You are the only man except my

brother, who knew where I was. You withheld your information, and have deceived me grossly."

"You are one of the most perfectly foolish persons," said Silcote, "that I ever met in my life."

Her own habit of "hitting out," retorted on herself so singularly, made her pause in answering. Before she answered he was at her again.

"You love to call me a fool. It keeps your tongue in order. But in my worst times I never was so foolish as you. I knew that you had come into this 4,000*l.* a year some time ago, but I kept the knowledge of it from you. I loved you, and I love you; but *you have no settlements*, and he could use it. And he would gamble it away in less than a year. He is in the Austrian army, and—they are going to fight."

"You would not have him dead?" she asked, and began walking rapidly up and down the hall.

"Not I. I only reminded you that he will have the spending of your money, and will spend it; and then your boy will be dependent entirely on me, who am half-fool and half-madman, according to your account. You and your boy are, in reality, at my

mercy if you declare yourself. And then you irritate me, and make me dangerous."

"How often am I to tell you that I am not afraid of you. I see that it was in kindness to me that you practised this deceit on me, and advised my brother to do the same. Well, I forgive you; let there be peace."

"I have no objection," growled the Squire. "*I* don't want to have any row. I act for the best and then I catch it. It is a grateful world, this. I have let my servants do pretty much as they please, and I know I am being cheated right and left."

"Serve you right for tempting them. You had much better leave this for a time and come with me, to help me in my work."

"What may that be?"

"Trying to reclaim my husband, and righting the memory of your wife."

"Giving four thousand a year to a gambler to spend, and disinheriting your own son. For, if matters are cleared up, Algernon is my heir. In such an utterly foolish errand you are quite right to select the greatest fool of your acquaintance; and I am that fool. I am

complimented by your selection, and join you with pleasure."

"Had not you better go to bed for a few hours?"

"Why?"

"Because you are in one of those fits of silly cynical ill-temper which the folks hereabouts call your 'dark moods.' Try and sleep it off. Go to bed, that's a good man."

There must be some truth in some kind of homœopathy—though in this case the dose was anything but infinitesimal—for the effect of her sarcastic scorn matched against his was most beneficial. The humour displayed on both sides was small, but hers neutralized his. He stamped up and down for about a minute, and then, saying aloud, "Confound the woman! I would have disinherited Tom ten years sooner if I had known he had married such a shrew," looked up at her laughing.

She knew when she had gained her object, and when to stop. She laughed also, and said, with only the ghost of an emphasis on the "now" (she was too much of a woman to forego *that*)—

"Now, my dear father-in-law, we will talk business."

To which he answered, "I will do everything you can possibly desire if you will only stay by me. I must not part from you."

"You shall not. Let nothing part us. My duty is with you, Silcote; but there are conditions; nay, only one."

"Let us have it."

"That we two do right, nothing but right, and most inexorably right, in following out our bargain; and that we utterly disregard consequences of all sorts and kinds."

The Squire loitered into the porch, and she followed him for her answer.

"How splendid the crocuses are this spring," he said first; "and that daphne too, in full bloom so early. Do you know the scent of the daphne; the most rich, glorious, overpowering scent in the world, to which that of the magnolia seems like a grocer's spices? How do the storms and frosts of a bitter northern winter develop such a pure sweet scent as that?"

"Go, cut me a sprig of it, and bring back your answer with it."

He went, smiling, and did as she told him. He held

the beautiful pink, rich-scented bough to her face, and as he did so kissed her on her forehead, and said, "I agree."

"Let me understand to what."

"To the righting of all previous wrongs without regard to consequences. To doing the right henceforth. On a condition."

"What condition?"

"That you are not to dictate exactly what is right and what is wrong without consultation with me."

"Well," she said, "I will agree to that for two reasons. The first is, that if you allow discussion I shall always have my own way, and the second is, that the difference between right and wrong was settled immoveably before Adam and Eve appeared on the earth, and that you and I know the difference between them, which some don't. I have another thing to say to you."

"Well?"

"I wish to be very tender and delicate about it, dear Silcote, but I am a coarse and rough-spoken woman. I spoke roughly to you about it in my room at St. Mary's, a little while ago, but I will speak roughly to you no more. We are allied. You wish your wife

righted, and *you wish to know yourself that she is* *righted.*"

The poor Squire leant against the porch, and looked out into the woods for a little time before he answered.

"I think so. I think that I could bear the horrible burden of my most hideous and ghastly mistake better if it was demonstrated to me by undoubtable evidence. I think so. I am a lawyer, and have been accustomed to examine evidence, and the evidence against her was frightfully strong. Your sentimental special pleading has done more than made me doubt; I have acquitted her often and often, but not always. In my darker moods I doubt again. I think that I would rather have it cleared up without doubt; so that she and I might stand clear, the one before the other; that I might ask her forgiveness with no cloud of doubt between us. In my present mood, while I am with you, I believe her to be an innocent, deeply-wronged woman; and I wish her proved so—in my present mood."

"But we are going to have none of the old moods, Silcote, are we?"

"None! None! But you see the nameless misery and despair which the clearing of her character would—*would* be confounded—*will* bring on me. She was trusted to me, she trusted herself to me, and I murdered her. Can you wonder that I want your noble strength to help me through? But I will go through with it—if you will only stay by me—to the death."

"God help you, my poor Silcote! God help you! Do you never pray?"

"Not I. *I* pray. I'll pray to her for forgiveness."

"Could you not cast yourself on God?"

"I am too old, I expect. I did not begin soon enough, I suppose."

"It is not too late."

"You are a good woman, but women don't understand that sort of thing. Arthur is the priest of the family. I had him bred for it. When I want a priest I'll send for Arthur, and endure his tongue, which is a sharp one. I paid for his education as a priest, and I have a right to his services. I don't like the amateur style of business at all, neither in law nor divinity. An attorney's clerk may air his opinions before a police magistrate with success, just as you may have your

amateur notions about theology. But Arthur has eaten his dinners, so to speak, and you haven't. In either of the professions of Law, Physic, or Divinity, I go in for the regular practitioner against the quack."

"We must leave this greatest business of all alone, then, for the present, and trust to God. Now, have you any proofs? Will you put them in my hands? May I open this black box in your bedroom?"

"You may go and get it."

"You are not angry with me again?"

"May God bless you, my dear. I angry with you? Go and get the box, and let us have it over."

She went, and returned with a little black despatch-box. Silcote was gone when she returned, but soon came back, explaining that he had been for the key. It was a rusty key, not used apparently for a long time. He opened the box with it, and the box was empty!

They looked at one another for a few moments in blank astonishment, and then Mrs. Thomas Silcote burst out laughing. Silcote himself did not laugh, but looked seriously and sadly at her.

She laughed long and heartily, and when she spoke,

said, "Laugh with me, my dear father-in-law, I pray you. There is serious work before us, which we must see out together ; but laugh now at the absurd side of the business, just once in a way. You and I shall not have much to laugh at for a long time : let us laugh at this."

"I cannot."

"I can, and I'll tell you why. Because here is the darkest, deepest mystery of all : this great Silcote complication come to an end in an empty morocco despatch-box with a morocco lining, and nothing at all in it. This is the *dénouement* of the great Silcote plot or mystery which has darkened and rendered useless your life for forty years or so. It was through this that you took to keeping your bloodhounds, now as amiable and as foolish as yourself. It was through this that you cut yourself off from society, and made yourself a marked man in the county, delighting in your evil name with all the ostentation of a real Silcote (*roturiers* as you are). This is the very box on which you told me the devil danced every night as soon as you put out your candle. What a clever devil it must have been to dance on the empty box, while you

were routing in bed, and maddening yourself about its contents!"

"Steady with that tongue of yours, my dear," said Silcote. "Steady! Steady!"

"I beg pardon," she said; "I beg a hundred pardons. I thought I had got it in order, but you see I have not as yet. My excuse is that anything theatrically false irritates me, as far as I can be irritated. Your life has been a theatrically false one, and I laugh when I see that it gets a little ridiculous in the end. Well, well. There is work before the pair of us, and I will curb my tongue; and I will not laugh any more. With regard to this preposterous box, on which the devil danced: what was in it?"

"The letter which accused my wife of trying to poison me."

"Hah! and it is there no longer," said Mrs. Thomas. "What a thing for a play! And what was this document like?"

"I will tell you something," said Silcote.

"Do" she said, "and I will laugh no more. The farce of the thing is over, and the tragedy is coming. You and I shall want all our wits. My daily thoughts

reappear in my nightly dreams, and always I see the white trampled under by the red and blue."

"But the white will win this time."

"No, no."

"We ought to be there, daughter, if you think so."

"We ought to be there, father, for I do think so. What is this 'something,' which you were going to tell me?"

"About this accusation which was in that now empty box. It was clumsily forged to imitate my sister, the Princess's handwriting. I always knew it was not hers, but I suspected she had something to do with it: that is the reason of our estrangement."

"And of the bloodhounds, and, to put it mildly, of your behaviour to society generally. If you had gone in for writing a play or a novel, I can conceive that you might have resorted to a ridiculous sort of mystery. As it is you are without excuse. Why did not you have it out with her like a man? But I am dumb. I promised to curb my tongue, and I will."

"At what particular period of the future," growled out Silcote, "do you mean to curb your tongue? I should like to know, because, if you would fix the date,

I would deprive myself of the pleasure of your company till it came due. If you will stop your tongue—not that I hope for any such happiness—I will tell you the remainder of my something.”

“Go on. I will be quiet.”

“Do. Well, then, my poor sister has stolen this accusation from me. She has thought that I believed that it was really in her handwriting, and she has violated my despatch-box and carried it away. Do you understand?”

“I do *not* understand. I am neither a novelist, a barrister, nor a play writer, and I do *not* understand. I *know* this. That you, who, as a lawyer, ought to have made all things clear, seem in your particular way to have confounded things more deeply. Your foolish sister has scarcely with her active mendacity confounded things more than you have by your foolish reticence. But we ought to go and see after it, you and I. A woman who could rob her brother's despatch-box is capable of a good deal of mischief. You and I ought to go and look after matters.”

“You have sent for your cousin here, have you not?”

"Yes. I thought it best. I can't trust you out of my sight. Miss Lee comes to-morrow or next day. Where is Arthur? We must not have a meeting here. Is he really gone abroad?"

"Yes, he is actually gone. He is really ill. Dr. F—— has sent him to Boppart. He wanted to stick to his work at the school, but Dr. F—— would not have it. If you and I go south, we must pick him up by the way. Arthur irritates and bullies me at times, but I love Arthur and you better than any others in the world. As for Thomas, your husband, my dear, he has worn my love out, as he did yours."

"I don't know *that*," said she; "there are some people so intensely agreeable that they may sin till seventy times seven. There are but few of them, and you are not one; but I doubt Tom is."

A very few words are necessary to explain that the legal recognition of Mrs. Thomas Silcote as Mrs. Sugden had been easily made, and that Miss Lee received her cousin with open arms. Silcote had rather fought shy of meeting his daughter-in-law for a short time, in consequence of the little deceit he had used towards her. He thought that he was

wise, in keeping the knowledge of her wealth from her, until he knew her mind about Tom. He thought that there could be no harm in procrastination. In this case it meant ruin.

END OF VOL. II.

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